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Fantasy AND Science Fiction

ISAAC ASIMOV

All Gall

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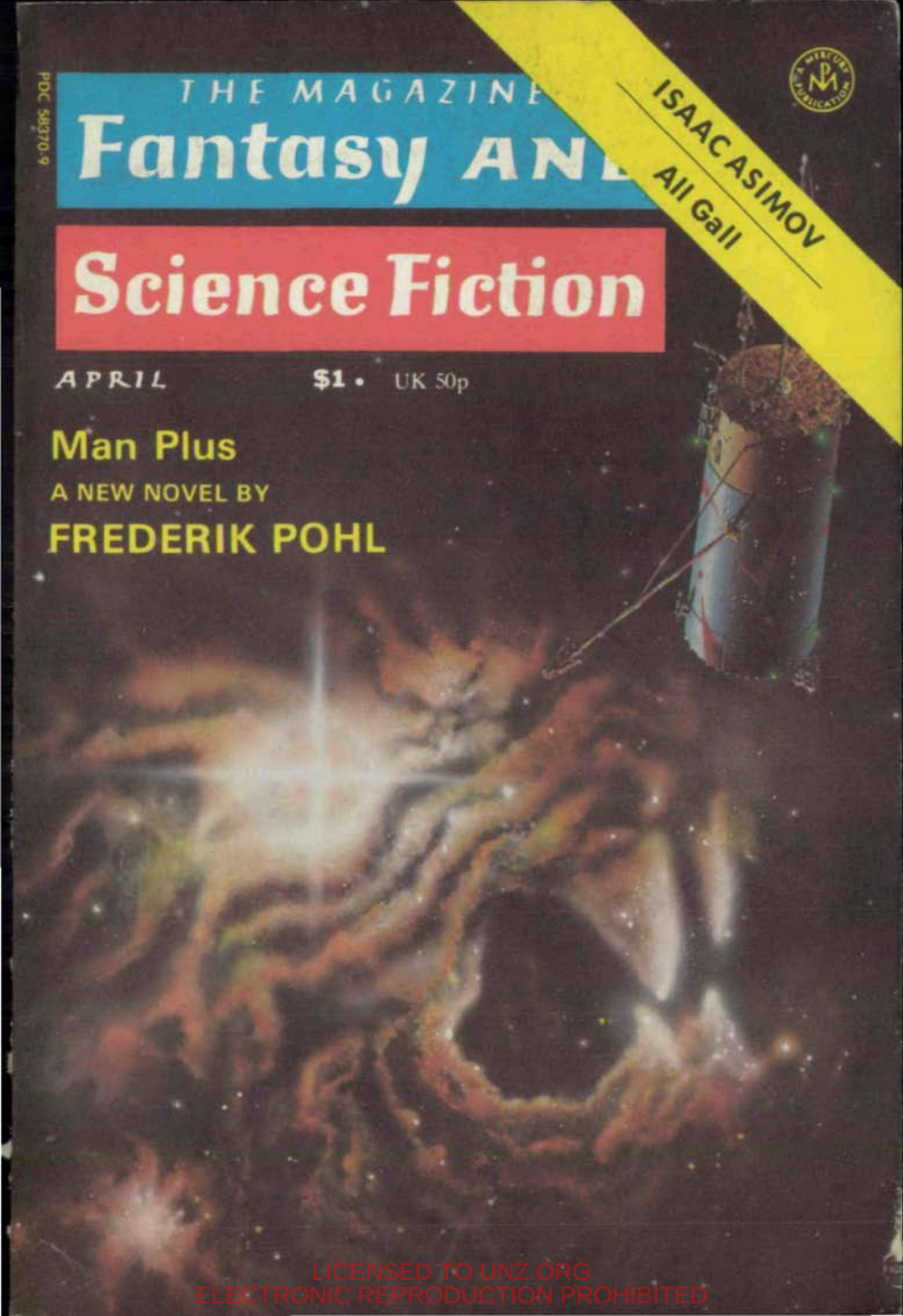
Man Plus

A NEW NOVEL BY

FREDERIK POHL



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Fantasy and Science Fiction

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This is Fred Pohl's first novel since The Age of the Pussyfoot, *which first appeared more than ten years ago. An event then, but more important than that, a work that carries the promise of such stunning recent stories as "The Gold at the Starbow's End" and "In the Problem Pit" into novel length.*

Man Plus

by FREDERIK POHL

(1st of 3 parts)

Chapter One

An Astronaut and His World

It is necessary for us to tell you about Roger Torraway. One human being does not seem particularly important, when there are eight billion alive. Not more important than, e.g., a single microchip in a memory store. But a single chip can be decisive when it carries an essential bit, and Torraway was important in just that way.

He was a good-looking man, as human beings go. Famous, too. Or had been.

There had been a time when Roger Torraway hung in the sky for two months and three weeks, along with five other astronauts. They were all dirty, horny and mostly bored. That wasn't what made him famous. That was just "people in the news" stuff, fit for two sentences on the seven o'clock wrapup on a dull night.

But he did get famous. In Bechuanaland and Baluchistan and Buffalo people knew his name. *Time* gave him its cover. He didn't have it all to himself. He had to share it with the rest of his team in the orbiting lab, because they were the ones who got lucky and rescued the Soviet bunch that came back to Earth with no steering jets.

So they were all famous men overnight. Torraway was twenty-eight years old when that happened and had just married a green-eyed, black-haired teacher of ceramic sculpture. Dorrie on Earth was what made him yearn, and Rog in orbit was what made Dorrie a celebrity too, which she loved.

It took something special to make an astronaut's wife newsworthy. There were so many of them. They looked so much alike.

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The newspersons used to think that NASA picked the astronauts' wives out of the entries in Miss Georgia contests. They all had that look, as though as soon as they changed out of their bathing suits they would show you some baton-twirling or recite *The Female of the Species*. Dorrie Torraway was a little too intelligent-looking for that, although she was also definitely pretty enough for that. She was the only one of the astronaut wives to get a major space in both *Ladies' Home Journal* ("Twelve Xmas Gifts You Can Bake in Your Kiln") and *Ms* ("Children Would Spoil My Marriage").

Rog was all for the nonfamily. He was all for everything Dorrie wanted, because he was for Dorrie very much.

In that he was a little less like his fellows, who had mostly discovered fine female fringe benefits from the space program. In other ways he was just like them. Bright, healthy, smart, personable, technically trained. Their hobbies were chess, swimming, hunting, flying, skydiving, fishing and golf. They mingled easily with Senators and ambassadors. When they retired from the space program, they found jobs with aerospace companies or with lost causes needing a new publicity image. Those jobs paid very well. Astronauts were valuable products. They were not only prized by the publicity media and the Man in the Street. We valued them very highly too.

What the astronauts represented was a dream. The dream was priceless to the Man in the Street, especially if it was a dank, stinking Calcutta street, where families slept on the sidewalk and roused themselves at dawn to queue for the one free bowl of food. It was a gritty, grimy world, and space gave it a little bit of beauty and excitement. Not much. Better than none at all.

The astronauts formed a tight little community, all around Tonka, Oklahoma.

Rog and Dorrie fit nicely into that community. They made friends easily. They were just oddball enough to be distinctive, not odd enough to worry anyone. If Dorrie didn't want to have children herself, she was nice with the children of the other wives. When Vic Samuelson was out of radio contact for five days on the far side of the Sun and Verna Samuelson came taken down with early labor pains, Dorrie took Verna's three infants into her own home. None of them was over five years old. Two of them were still in diapers, and she changed them uncomplainingly while other wives took care of Verna's house and Verna took care of giving birth to her

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fourth in the NASA hospital. At the Christmas parties Rog and Dorrie never got the drunkest, nor were they ever the first to leave.

They were a nice couple.

They lived in a nice world.

In that they were, they knew, lucky. The rest of the world wasn't all that nice. The little wars chased themselves all over Asia and Africa and Latin America. Western Europe was sometimes strangled by strikes and often crippled by shortages, and when winter came it usually shivered. People were hungry, and a lot of them were angry, and there were very few cities a person would want to walk in alone at night.

But Tonka kept itself unpermissive and pretty safe, and astronauts (and cosmonauts, and sinonauts) visited Mercury and Mars as well as the moon, swam into the halos of comets and hung in orbit around gas giants.

Torraway himself had flown five major missions. First he flew in one of the shuttle flights to replenish Spacelab, back in the early days after the freeze, when the space program was just getting on its feet again.

Then he spent eighty-one days in the second-generation space station. That was his big moment, that got him the cover of *Time*. The Russkis had fired off a manned mission to Mercury, and it had got there all right, and landed all right, and taken off for the return trip all right; but nothing after that was all right. The Russians had always had trouble with their stabilizing thrusters — several of the early cosmonauts had set themselves spinning and not been able to stop and vomited all over the insides of their spacecraft helplessly. This time they had trouble again and used up their attitude correction reserves.

So they managed to get themselves into a wide-assed elliptical orbit around Earth, but they had no way to get out of it safely. Or to stay in it safely, either. Their control was only approximate by then, and the periterran point was low enough inside the ionosphere of Earth's atmosphere to heat them up pretty badly.

But Roger and the other five Americans were sitting there in a spacecraft designed for tug duty, with fuel hoarded for half a dozen more missions. That wasn't any too much, but they made it do; matched course and velocity with the *Avrora Dva*, linked up and got the cosmonauts out. What a spectacle of free-fall bearhugs and bristly kisses! Back in the space tug with what the Russians had grabbed up to bring with them, they had a party, currant juice toasting Tang, pate traded for cheeseburgers. And two orbits later

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the *Avrora* meteored in. "Like a bright exhalation in the evening," said Yuli Bronin, the cosmonaut who had gone to Oxford, and kissed his rescuers again.

When they got back down to Earth, belted in two to a hammock, closer than lovers, they were all heroes, and they were all adored, even Roger, even by Dorrie.

But that was long ago.

Since then Roger Torraway had done two circumlunar flights, tending ship while the radio-telescope crews conducted their orbital tests on the big new forty-mile radio mirror on the farside. And finally he was on the aborted Mars lander, another time when they were lucky to get everyone back on Earth in one piece. But by then the glamor was gone once more.

So most of Roger's work since then had been, well, diplomatic. He played golf with Senators on the space committee and commuted to the Eurospace installations in Zurich and Munich and Trieste. He had a modest sale with his memoirs. He served as backup on an occasional mission. As the space program declined more rapidly from national priority to contingency-planning exercises, he had less and less that mattered to do.

Still, he was backing up a mission now, although he didn't talk about it when he was wooing political support for the agency.

He wasn't allowed to. This new manned mission, which looked as though it would actually be approved, sooner or later, was the first one in the space program that had been classified Top Secret.

We expected a great deal from Roger Torraway, although he was not much different from any of the other astronauts: a little overtrained, a lot underemployed, a good deal discontented with what was happening in their jobs, but very much unwilling to trade them for any others as long as there was still a chance to be great again. They were all like that, even the one that was a monster.

Chapter Two

What the President Wanted

The man who was a monster was on Torraway's mind a lot. He had a special interest.

Torraway was sitting in the co-pilot's seat at twenty-four thousand meters over Kansas, watching a blip on the IDF radar slide smoothly off the screen. "Shit," said the pilot. The blip was a Soviet Concordski III, their CB-5 had been racing it ever since they had picked it up over the Garrison Dam Reservoir.

Torraway grinned and throttled back another tiny increment. With the boost in relative speed, the

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Concordski blip picked up a momentum. "We were losing him," the pilot said glumly. "Where do you reckon he's going? Venezuela, maybe?"

"He better be," said Torraway, "considering how much fuel the both of you were burning up."

"Yeah, well," said the pilot, not at all embarrassed at the fact that he had been well over the international treaty limit of 1.5 Mach. "What's happening at Tulsa? Usually they let us come straight in, with a V.I.P. like you."

"Probably some bigger V.I.P. landing now," said Roger. It wasn't a guess. He knew it. He knew who the V.I.P. was, and they didn't come any bigger than the President of the United States.

"You don't do much flying any more, do you?" the pilot said.

"Only when somebody like you lets me."

"No sweat. What do you do, anyway, if you don't mind my asking? I mean, besides V.I.P.-ing it around."

Torraway had an answer all ready for that. "Administration," he said. He always said that, when people asked what he did. Sometimes the people who asked had proper security clearance, not only with the government but with the private radar in his own mind that told him to trust one person and not another. Then he said, "I make monsters." If what they said next indicated that they too were in the know, he might go a sentence or two farther.

There was no secret about the Exomedicine Project. Everyone knew that what they did in Tonka was prepare astronauts to live on Mars. What was secret was how they did it: the monster. If Torraway had said too much, he would have jeopardized both his freedom and his job. And Roger liked his job. It supported his pretty wife in her pottery shop. It gave him the feeling of doing something that people would remember, and it took him to interesting places.

They came in over the Cimarron River, or the crooked red gully that would be the river when it rained again, bent the jet flow to almost straight down, cut back on the power and eased gently in.

"Thanks," Roger said to the pilot, and went back to collect his gear from the V.I.P. cabin.

This time it had been Beirut, Rome, Seville and Saskatoon before he got back to Oklahoma, each place hotter than the place before. Because they were expected at the ceremonial briefing for the President, Dorrie met him at the airport. He changed swiftly into the clothes she had brought him in a motel room. He was glad to be back, glad to be getting back to making monsters and glad to be

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back with his wife. While he showered he had a swift and powerful erotic impulse. He got out of the shower. He had a clock inside his head that kept track of what pieces of time were available so that he did not need to check his watch; there was time. It would not matter if they were a few minutes late. But Dorrie wasn't in the chair where he had left her; the TV was going, her cigarette was burning out in the ashtray, but she was gone. Roger sat on the edge of the bed with a towel wrapped around him until the clock in his head said there was not enough time left to matter. Then he began to dress. He was tying his tie when Dorrie rapped on the door. "Sorry," she said when he opened for her. "I couldn't find the Coke machine. One for you and one for me."

Dorrie was almost as tall as Roger, brunette by choice, green-eyed by nature. She took a brush from her bag and touched up the back and sleeves of his jacket, then touched Coke cans with him and drank. "We'd better go," she said. "You look gorgeous."

"You look screwable," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder.

"I just put lipstick on," she said, turning her lips away and allowing him to kiss her cheek. "But I'm glad to see the senoritas didn't use you all up."

He chuckled good-humoredly; it was their joke that he slept with a different girl in every city. He liked the joke. It wasn't true. His couple of generally unsatisfactory experiments at adultery had been more shabby and troublesome than rewarding, but he liked thinking of himself as the sort of man whose wife had to worry about the attentions of other women. "Let's not keep the President waiting," he said. "I'll check out while you get the car."

They did not in fact keep the President waiting; they had more than two hours to go through before they even saw him.

Roger was familiar with the general process of being screened; it had happened to him before. It wasn't only the President of the United States who was taking 200 per cent overlap precautions against assassins these days; he had been a whole day getting to see the Pope, and even so there had been a Swiss Guard holding a Beretta standing right behind him every minute he was in the papal chamber.

Half of the top brass of the lab was here for the briefing. The senior lounge had been cleaned and polished for the occasion and did not look like its familiar coffee-drinking self. Even the blackboards and the paper napkins that were used for scratchpaper were tucked

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away out of sight. Folding screens had been set up in the corners, the shades of the nearest windows descreetly pulled down; that was for the physical search, Roger knew. After that they would have their interviews with the psychiatrists. Then, if everyone passed, if no lethal hypodermic turned up in a hat pin or murderous obsession turned up in a head, they would all go to the auditorium, and there the President would join them.

Four Secret Service men participated in the process of searching, frisking, magnetometering and identifying the male guests, though only two of the men physically took part. The other two just stood there, presumably ready to draw and fire at need. Female Secret Service personnel searched the wives and Kathleen Doughty. The women were searched behind one of the shoulder-high screens, but Roger could read from the expressions on his wife's face the progress of the patting, probing hands. Dorrie did not like being touched by strangers. There were times when she did not like being touched at all, but above all by strangers.

When it came Roger's own turn he understood some of the cold anger he had seen on his wife's face. They were being unusually thorough. His armpits were investigated. His belt was loosened and the cleft of his buttocks probed. His testicles were palped. Everything in his pockets came out; the handkerchief at his breast was shaken open and swiftly refolded, neater than before.

Everyone had the same treatment, even the director, who gazed around the room with good-natured resignation while fingers combed the kinky hair under his arms. The only exception was Don Kayman, who had worn his cassock in view of the formality of the occasion and, after some whispered discussion, was escorted into another room to take it off. "Sorry, Father," said the guard, "but you know how it is."

Don shrugged, left with the man, came back looking annoyed. Roger was beginning to feel annoyed too. It would have been sensible, he thought, for them to have passed some of the people on to the shrinks as soon as they had had their search completed. These were, after all, high-powered types and their time was worth money. But the Secret Service had its own system and operated by stages. It was not until everyone had been searched that the first group of three were conducted to the typist rooms, evacuated specially to make room for the interviews.

Roger's shrink was Black by courtesy, actually a sort of coffee-cream color by complexion. They

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sat in facing straight-backed chairs, eighteen inches between their knees. The psychiatrist said, "I'll make this as short and painless as I can. Are your parents both alive?"

"No, actually neither of them. My father died two years ago, my mother when I was in college."

"What sort of work did your father do?"

"Rented fishing boats in Florida." With half his mind Roger described the old man's Key Largo boat livery, with the other half maintained his 24-hour-a-day surveillance of himself. Was he showing enough annoyance at being questioned like this? Not too much? Was he relaxed enough? More relaxed that enough?

"I've seen your wife," said the psychiatrist. "A very sexy-looking woman. Do you mind my saying that?"

"Not at all," said Roger, bristling.

"Some white people would not like to hear that from me. How do you feel about it?"

"I know she's sexy," Roger snapped. "That's what made me want to marry her."

"Would you mind if I went a step further and asked how the screwing is?"

"No, of course not — well, hell. Yes. I mind," said Roger savagely. "It's about like anybody else's, I guess. After being married a few years."

The psychiatrist leaned back, looking thoughtfully at Roger. He said, "In your case, Dr. Torraway, this interview is pretty much a formality. You've had quarterly checks for the last seven years and profiled well within the normal range every time. There's nothing voilent or unstable in your history. Let me just ask you if you feel uneasy about meeting the President."

"A little awed, maybe," said Roger thoughtfully, shifting gears.

"That's natural enough. Did you vote for Dash?"

"Sure — wait the hell a minute. That's none of your business!"

"Right, Dr. Torraway. You can go back to the briefing room now."

They didn't actually let him go back in the same room, but in one of the smaller conference chambers. Kathleen Doughty joined him almost at once. They had worked together for two and a half years, but she was still formal. "Looks like we've passed, Mr. Dr. Colonel Torraway, sir," she said, her eyes focused as usual on a point over his left shoulder, the cigarette held between her face and him.

His five minutes with the shrink had reinforced his self-observing stance, and he was busily analyzing with one part of his mind. Why did he feel uneasy in this woman's

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presence? Not just because she was wiggy in her mannerisms. He wondered if the trouble was that she admired his courage so much. He had tried to explain to her that being an astronaut no longer took much courage, no more than flying a transport, probably less than driving a cab. Of course, as a backup for Man Plus there was a very real danger. But only if the men ahead of him in line all dropped out, and that was not a chance to cause much worry. Nevertheless she went on regarding him with that intensity that in some lights seemed to be admiration, and in others pity.

With the other part of his mind, as always, he was alert for his wife. When she finally came in she was angry, and, for her, disheveled. The hair she had spent an hour putting up was now down. It hung waist length, a fine frothy fall of black that made her look like a Tenniel drawing of Alice, if Tenniel had been working for *Playboy* at the time. Roger hurried over to soothe her, a job which took so much of his attention that he was caught off-guard when he felt a sudden stir and heard someone say, not very loud or formally, "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States."

Fitz-James Deshatine came grinning and nodding into the room, looking exactly like himself on television, only shorter. Without prompting the lab people sorted themselves into a semicircle, and the President went around it, shaking every hand, with the project director at his side making the introductions. Deshatine had been beautifully briefed. He had the politician's trick of catching every name, and making some sort of personal response. To Kathleen Doughty it was: "Glad to see some Irish in this crew, Dr. Doughty." To Roger it was: "We met once before, Colonel Torraway. After that fine job with the Russians. Let's see, that must be seven years ago, when I was chairman of the Senate committee. Perhaps you remember." Certainly Roger remembered, and was flattered, and knew he was being flattered, that the President remembered. To Dorrie it was: "Good heavens, Mrs. Torraway, how come a pretty girl like you wastes herself on one of these scientific johnnies?" Roger stiffened a little when he heard that. It was not so much that it was down-putting to him, it was the kind of empty compliment Dorrie always disdained. But she was not disdaining it. Coming from the President of the United States, it brought a sparkle to her eyes. "What a beautiful man," she whispered, following his progress as he made the circle.

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When he had finished he hopped to the little platform and said:

"Well, friends, I came here to look and listen, not to talk. But I do want to thank every one of you for putting up with the nonsense they make you go through to have me around. I'm sorry about that. It isn't my idea. They just tell me it's necessary, as long as there are so many whacks around. And as long as the enemies of the Free World are what they are and we're the kind of open, trusting people *we* are." He grinned directly at Dorrie. "Tell me, did they make you soak your fingernails before they let you in?"

Dorrie laughed musically, startling her husband. (She had been complaining with vicious anger that her nail polish had been ruined.) "They certainly did, Mr. President. Just like my manicurist," she called.

"Sorry about that. They say that's to make sure that you don't have any secret bio-chem-i-cal poisons to scratch me with when we shake hands. Anyway," he chuckled, "if you think it's a nuisance for you pretty ladies, you should see how my old cat acts when they do it to her. Good thing she didn't really have poison on her claws last time they did it. She scored on three Secret Service men, my nephew and two of her own kittens before she was through." He laughed, and Roger was a little surprised to find that he and Dorrie and the rest were joining in.

"Anyway," said the President, coming to the point, "I'm grateful for your courtesy. And I am one thousand times more grateful for the way you're pushing the Man Plus project through. I don't have to tell you what it means to the Free World. There's Mars out there, the only piece of real estate around that's worth having, apart from the one we're all standing on right now. By the end of this decade it's going to belong to somebody. There's only two choices. It will belong to them, or it will belong to us. And I want it to be us. You people are the ones that are going to make sure that happens, because you're going to give us the Man Plus that will live on Mars. I want to thank you deeply and sincerely, from the bottom of my heart, in the name of every living human being in the Free World democratic lands, for making this dream possible. And now," he said, smothering an attempt at a round of polite applause, "I think it's time I stopped talking and started listening. I want to see what's happening with our Man Plus. General Scanyon, it's all yours."

"Right, Mr. President."

Vern Scanyon was director of the laboratory division of the

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Grissom Memorial Institute of Space Medicine. He was also a retired two-star general, and acted it. He checked his watch, glanced at his executive assistant (he sometimes called him his executive officer) for confirmation and said:

"We have a few minutes before Commander Hartnett finishes his warmup tests. Suppose we look in on him on the closed circuit for a minute. Then I'll try to tell you what's going to happen today."

The room darkened.

A TV projection screen lighted up behind the platform.

The screen showed a man.

He did not look like a man. His name was Will Hartnett. He was an astronaut, a Democrat, a Methodist, a husband, a father, an amateur tympanist, a beautifully smooth ballroom dancer; but to the eye he was none of those things. To the eye he was a monster.

He did not look human at all. His eyes were glowing, red-faceted globes. His nostrils flared in flesh folds, like the snout of a star-nosed mole. His skin was artificial; its color was normal heavy suntan, but its texture was that of a rhinoceros's hide. Nothing that could be seen about him was of the appearance he had been born with. Eyes, ears, lungs, nose, mouth, circulatory system, perceptual centers, heart, skin — all had been replaced or augmented. The changes that were visible were only the iceberg's tip. What had been rebuilt, for the single purpose of fitting him to stay alive, without external artificial aids, on the surface of the planet Mars.

He was a Cyborg — a cybernetic organism. He was part man and part machine, the two disparate sections fused together so that even Will Hartnett, looking at himself in the mirror on the occasions when he was permitted to see a mirror, did not know what of him was him and what had been added.

In spite of the fact that nearly everyone in the room had actually played a part in creating the Cyborg, in spite of the familiarity all of them had had with his photos, TV image and his person itself, there was a muffled gasp. As the TV camera caught him he was doing endless effortless pushups. The view was from a yard or so from the top of his strangely formed head, and as Hartnett locked himself up on his arms, his eyes came level with the camera, glinting from the facets that gave him multiple scanning of the environment.

He looked very strange. Roger, remembering the old movies of his childhood hours before the TV, thought that his good old buddy looked a lot weirder than any animated carrot or magnified

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beetle on the horror shows. Hartnett had been born in Danbury, Connecticut. Every visible artifact he wore had been manufactured in California, Texas, Alabama or New York. But none of it looked human, or even terrestrial. He looked *Martian*.

In the sense that form follows function, Martian he was. He was shaped for Mars. In a sense, too, he was there already. Grissom Labs had the finest Mars-normal tanks in the world, and Hartnett's pushups were on iron-oxide sands, in a pressure chamber where the weight of gas had been dropped to 10 millibars, only one per cent of the thrust on the outside of the double glass walls. The temperature of the sparse gas molecules around him was held at fifty degrees below zero, Fahrenheit. Batteries of high-ultraviolet lamps flooded the scene with the exact spectrum of sunlight on a Martian winter day.

If the place where Hartnett was was not truly Mars, it was close enough to fool even a Martian — if there had ever been such things as Martians — in every respect but one. In all but that one respect, a Ras Thavas or a Wellsian mollusk might have emerged from sleep, looked about him and decided that he was indeed on Mars, on a late fall day in the middle latitudes, shortly after sunrise.

The one anomaly simply could not be helped. He was subject to standard Earth gravity instead of the fractional attraction that would be proper for the surface of Mars. The engineers had gone so far as to calculate the cost of flying the entire Mars-normal tank in a jet conversion, dropping it along a calculated parabola to simulate, at least for ten or twenty minutes at a time, the proper Martian weights. They had decided against it on the grounds of cost and, pondering, had estimated, allowed for and finally dismissed the effects of the one anomaly.

The one thing no one feared might go wrong with Hartnett's new body was that it might be too weak for any stresses that might be placed on it. He was already lifting 500-pound weights. When he really reached Mars, he would be able to carry more than half a ton.

In a sense Hartnett on Earth was more hideous than he would be on Mars, because his telemetry equipment was as monstrous as himself. Pulse, temperature and skin resistance sensor pads clung to his shoulder and head. Probes reached under the tough artificial skin to measure his internal flows and resistances. Transmitter antennae fanned out like a peasant's broom from his backpack. Everything that was going on in his system was being continually

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measured, encoded and transmitted to the 300 foot-per-second broadband recording tapes.

The President was whispering something. Roger Torraway found himself leaning forward to catch the end of it: "— can he hear what we say in here?"

"Not until I cycle us through his communications net," said General Scanyon.

"Uh-huh," said the President slowly, but whatever it had been that he intended to say if the Cyborg couldn't hear him, he didn't say it. Roger felt a twinge of sympathy. He himself still had to select what he said when the Cyborg could hear and censored what he said even when old Hartnett wasn't around. It was simply not right that anything that had drunk a beer and fathered a child should be so ugly.

The Cyborg appeared willing to keep up his metronome exercising forever, but someone who had been counting cadence — "one and two, one and two" — came to a halt, and the Cyborg stopped too. He stood up, methodically and rather slowly, as though it were a new dance step he was practicing. With a reflex action that no longer had a function, he rubbed the back of a thick-skinned hand against his plastic-smooth and browless forehead.

In the darkness Roger Torraway shifted position so he could see better, past the famous craggy profile of the President. Even in outline Roger could see that the President was frowning slightly. Roger put his arm around his wife's waist and thought about what it must be like to be the President of three hundred million Americans in a touchy and treacherous world. The power that flowed through the man in the darkness ahead of him could throw fusion bombs into every hidden corner of the world in ninety minutes' time. It was power of war, power of punishment, power of money. Presidential power had brought the Man Plus project into being in the first place. Congress had never debated the funding, knew only in the most general terms what was going on: the enabling act had been called "A Bill to Provide Supplementary Space Exploration Facilities at Presidential Discretion."

General Scanyon said, "Mr. President, Commander Hartnett would be glad to show you some of the capacities of his prostheses. Weight-lifting, high jump. Whatever you like."

"Oh, he's worked hard enough for one day," smiled the President.

"Right, then we'll go ahead, sir." He spoke softly into the communicator microphone and then turned back to the President. "Today's test is to disassemble and

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repair a short in the com unit under field conditions. We'll estimate seven minutes for the job. A panel of our own shop repair men, operating with all their tools in their own workshops, averaged about five minutes. So if Commander Hartnett makes it in the optimal time, that is pretty good evidence of close motor control."

"Yes, I see that," said the President. "What's he doing now?"

"Just waiting, sir. We're going to cycle him up to 150 millibars so he can hear and talk a little more easily."

The President said acutely, "I thought you had equipment to talk to him in total vacuum."

"Well, ah, yes, sir, we do. We've had a little trouble with that. At present our basic communitation facility at Mars-normal conditions is visual, but we expect to have the voice system functioning shortly."

"Yes, I hope so," said the President.

At the level of the tank, ninety feet into the ground under the room they were in, a graduate student functioning as a lab assistant responded to a cue and opened a valve — not to the external atmosphere, but to the tanks of Mars-normal gas that were mixed and ready in the pressure sink. Gradually the pressure built up to a thin, deepening whistle. The adding on of pressure to the 150-millibar level did not benefit Hartnett's functioning in any way. His redesigned body ignored most environmental factors. It could equally well tolerate arctic winds, total vacuum or a muggy day at Earth's equator, with the air at 1080 millibars and soggy with damp. One was as comfortable to him as another. Or as uncomfortable; for Hartnett had reported that his new body ached, tweaked and chafed.

At last the whistle stopped and they heard the Cyborg's voice. It was doll-shrill:

"Thanksss. Hold eet dere, weel you?" The low pressure played tricks with his diction, especially as he no longer had a proper trachea and larynx to work with. After a month as a Cyborg, speaking was becoming strange to him, for he was getting out of the habit of breathing anyway.

From behind Roger, the lab's expert in vision systems said glumly, "They know those eyes aren't make to stand sudden pressure changes. Serve them right if one of them cracks on them." Roger winced, with the fantasied pain of a faceted crystalline eyeball splintering in his socket. His wife laughed.

"Have a seat, Brad," she said, pulling away from Roger's arm. Absently Roger made room, staring up at the screen. The cadence-

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counting voice was saying:

"On the tick. Five. Four. Three. Two. One. Start sequence."

The cyborg squatted clumsily over the entry plate of a black-finished metal canister. Without haste he slid a blade-thin screwdriver into a nearly invisible slot, made a precise quarter turn, repeated the movement again in another place and lifted off the plate. The thick fingers sorted carefully through the multicolored spaghetti of the internal wiring, found a charred red-and-white candy-striped strand, detached it, shortened it to remove the burned insulation, stripped it down by simply pinching it through the nails, held it to a terminal. The longest part of the operation was waiting for the fluxing iron to heat; that took more than a minute. Then the new joint was brazed, the spaghetti stuffed back inside, the plate replaced and the Cyborg stood up.

"Six minutes eleven and two-fifths," reported the counting voice.

The project director led a round of applause.

He then stood up and delivered a short address. He told the President that the purpose of the Man Plus project was to so modify a human body that it could survive on the surface of Mars as readily and safely as a normal man could walk across a Kansas wheat field. He reviewed the space program from suborbital flight through space station and deep probe. He listed some of the significant data about Mars: land area actually greater than Earth's, in spite of its smaller diameter, because there were no seas to waste surface. Temperature range, suitable for life — suitably modified, to be sure. Potential wealth, incalculable. The President listened attentively although, to be sure, he knew every word.

Then he said, "Thanks, General Scanyon. Just let me say one thing."

He climbed nimbly up to the platform and smiled thoughtfully down at the scientists.

"When I was a boy," he began, "the world was simpler. The big problem was how to help the emerging free nations of Earth enter the community of civilized countries. Those were the Iron Curtain days. It was them on their side, locked in, quarantined. And all the rest of us on ours.

"Well," he said, "things have changed. The Free World has had bad times. Once you get off our own North American continent, what have you got? Collectivist dictatorships everywhere you look, bar one or two holdouts like Sweden and Israel. I'm not here to rake up ancient history. What's done is done, and there's no point

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blaming anybody. Everybody knows who lost China and gave Cuba to the other side. We know what administration let England and Pakistan fall. We don't have to talk about those things. We're just looking toward the future.

"And I tell you, ladies and gentlemen," he said earnestly, "the future of the free human race lies with you. Maybe we've had some setbacks here on our own planet. That's over and done with. We can look out into space. We look, and what do we see? We see another Earth. The planet Mars. As the distinguished director of your project, General Scanyon, just said, it's a bigger planet than the one we were born on, in the ways that are important. And it can be ours.

"That's where the future of freedom is, and it's up to you to give it to us. I know you will. I'm counting on every one of you."

He looked thoughtfully around the room, meeting every eye. The old Dash charisma was making itself felt all over the room.

Then he smiled suddenly, said, "Thank you," and was gone, in a wave of Secret Service men.

Chapter Three

Man Becoming Martian

Time was when the planet Mars looked like another Earth. The astronomer Schiaparelli, peering through his Milanese telescope at the celebrated conjunction of 1877, saw what he thought were "channels," announced them as "canali" and had them understood as "canals" by half the literate population of Earth. Including nearly all the astronomers. Who promptly turned their telescopes in the same direction and discovered more.

Canals? Then they must have been dug, for a purpose. What purpose? To hold water, there was no other explanation that saved the facts.

The logic of the syllogism was compelling, and by the turn of the century there was hardly a doubter in the world. It was accepted as lore that Mars held an older, wiser culture than our own. If only we could somehow speak to them, what marvels we would learn! Percival Lowell mused over a sketching pad and came up with a first attempt. Draw great Euclidean shapes on the Sahara desert, he said. Line them with brushwood, or dig them as trenches and fill them with oil. Then, on some moonless night when Mars is high in the African heavens, set them afire. Those alien Martian eyes that he took to be fixed firmly to their alien Martian telescopes would see. They would recognize the squares and

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triangles. They would understand that communication was intended and out of their older wisdom they would find a way to respond.

Then better telescopes were built and better ways were found to understand what they disclosed. To the lens and the mirror was added the spectroscope and the camera. In the eyes and understanding of astronomers Mars swam a little closer every day. At every step, as the image of the planet itself grew more sharp and clear, the vision of its putative inhabitants became more cloudy and less real. There was too little air. There was too little water. It was too cold. The canals broke up, under better resolution, into irregular blotches of surface markings. The cities that should have marked their junctions were not there.

By the time of the first Mariner fly-bys the Martian race, which had never lived except in the imagination of human beings, was irrevocably dead.

It still seemed that life of a sort could exist, perhaps lowly plants, even a rude sort of amphibian. But nothing like a man. On the surface of Mars an air-breathing, water-based creature like a human being could not survive for a quarter of an hour.

It would not be from simply strangulation. He would not live long enough for that to happen. In the 10-millibar pressure of the surface of Mars his blood would boil away and he would die, in agony, of something like the bends. If he somehow survived that, then he would die of lack of air to breathe. If he survived both of those — given air in a backpack and a face mask fed with a mixture of gases that did not contain nitrogen at some intermediate pressure level between Earth- and Mars-normal — he would still die. He would die from exposure to unshielded solar radiation. He would die from the extremes of Martian temperature — at its best a warmish spring day, at its coldest worse than Antarctic polar night. He would die from thirst. And if he could somehow survive all of those, he would die, more slowly, but surely, from hunger, since there was nowhere on the surface of Mars one morsel that a human being could eat.

But there is another kind of argument that contradicts the conclusions drawn from objective facts. Man is not bound by objective facts. If they inconvenience him, he changes them or makes an end-run around them.

Man cannot survive on Mars. However, man cannot survive in the Antarctic, either. But he does.

Man survives in places where he ought to die by bringing a kinder

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environment with him. He carries what he needs. His first invention along those lines was clothing. His second, storable food, like dried meat and parched grain. His third, fire. His most recent, the whole series of devices and systems that gave him access to the sea bottoms and to space.

Suppose one takes the standard human frame and alters some of the optional equipment. There's nothing to breathe on Mars. So take the lungs out of the human frame, replace them with micro-miniaturized oxygen regeneration cat-cracking systems. One needs power for that, but power flows down from the distant Sun.

The blood in the standard human frame would boil; all right, eliminate the blood, at least from the extremities and the surface areas — build arms and legs that are served by motors instead of muscles — and reserve the blood supply only for the warm, protected brain. A normal human body needs food, but if the major musculature is replaced by machines, the food requirement drops. It is only the brain that must be fed every minute of every day, and fortunately the brain is the least demanding of human accessories, in terms of energy requirements. A slice of toast a day will keep it going.

Water? It is no longer necessary, except for engineering losses — like adding hydraulic fluid to a car's braking system every few thousand miles. Once the body has become a closed system, no water needs to be flushed through it in the cycle drink, circulate, excrete or perspire.

Radiation? A two-edged problem. At unpredictable times there are solar flares, and, even on Mars, then there is too much of it for health; so the body needs to be clothed with an artificial skin. The rest of the time there is only the normal visible and ultraviolet light from the sun. It is not enough to maintain heat, and not quite enough even for good vision; so more surface must be provided to gather energy — hence the great bat-eared receptors on the Cyborg — and, to make vision as good as it can be made, the eyes are replaced with mechanical structures.

If one does all these things to a human being, what is left is no longer precisely a human being. It is a man plus large elements of hardware.

The man has become a cybernetic organism: a Cyborg.

The first man to be made into a Cyborg was, probably, Willy Hartnett. There was some doubt. There were persistent rumors of a Chicom experiment that had succeeded for a while, and then failed. But it was pretty clear that

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Hartnett was at least the only one alive at this particular moment. He had been born in the regular human way, and worn the regular human shape, for thirty-seven years. It was only in the last eighteen months that he had begun to change.

At first the changes were minor and temporary.

His heart was not removed. It was only bypassed now and then by a swift soft-plastic impeller that he wore for a week at a time strapped on a shoulder.

His eyes were not removed ... then. They were only sealed closed with a sort of gummy blindfold, while he practiced recognizing the perplexing shapes of the world as they were revealed to him through a shrilly buzzing electronic camera that was surgically linked to his optic nerve.

One by one the separate systems that would make him a Martian were tested. It was only when each component had been tested and adjusted and found satisfactory that the first permanent changes had been made.

They were not *really* permanent. That was a promise that Hartnett clung to. The surgeons had made it to Hartnett, and Hartnett had made it to his wife. All the changes could be reversed and would be. When the mission was over and he was safely back, they would remove the hardware and replace soft human tissues again, and he would be returned to purely human shape.

It would not, he understood, be exactly the shape he had started out with. They could not preserve his own organs and tissues. They could only replace them with equivalents. Organ transplants and plastic surgery would do all they could to make him look like himself again, but there was small chance he would ever again be able to travel on his old passport photo.

He did not greatly mind that. He had never considered himself a handsome man. He was content to know that he would have human eyes again — not his own, of course. But the doctors had promised they would be blue, and that lids and lashes would cover them again, and with any luck at all, they thought, the eyes could even weep. (With joy, he foresaw.) His heart would again be a lump of muscle the size of a fist. It would pump red human blood to all the ends of limb and body. The great photoreceptor bat-ears (that gave so much trouble, because their support strength was up to the demands of Martian gravitation but not terrestrial, so that they were constantly being detached and returned to the shop) would be dismantled and gone. The skin that had been so painfully constructed

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and fitted to him would be equally painfully flayed off again and replaced with human skin that sweated and grew hair.

Hartnett's wife had exacted one promise from him. She had made him swear that as long as he wore the Hallowe'en mask of the Cyborg, he would keep out of the sight of his children.

Fortunately the children were little enough to be biddable, and teachers, friends, neighbors, parents of schoolmates and all had been made cooperative by hints of stories of jungle rot and skin ailments. They had been curious, but the story had worked, and no one had urged Terry's father to come to a PTA or Brenda's husband to join her at their backyard barbecue.

Brenda Hartnett herself had tried not to see her husband, but in the long run curiosity drove out fear. She had herself smuggled into the tank room one day while Willy was practicing a coordination test, riding a bicycle around the reddish sands with a basin of water balanced on the handlebars. Don Kayman had stayed with her, fully expecting her to faint, or scream, or perhaps be sick to her stomach. She did none of those things, surprising herself as much as the priest. The Cyborg looked too much like a Japanese horror film to be taken seriously. It was only that night that she really related the bat-eared, crystal-eyed creature on the bike with the father of her children. The next day she went to the project's medical director and told him that Willy must be getting starved for screwing by then and she didn't see why she couldn't accommodate him. The doctor had to explain to her, what Willy had not been able to bring himself to say, that in the present state of the art those functions had had to be regarded as superfluous and therefore had been temporarily, uh, disconnected.

Meanwhile the Cyborg toiled away at his tests and awaited each next installment of pain.

His world was in three parts. The first part was a suite of rooms kept at a pressure equivalent to about 7500 feet of altitude, so that the project staff could go in and out with only mild inconvenience when they had to. This was where he slept when he could and ate what little he was given. He was always hungry, always. They'd tried, but they hadn't been able to disconnect the cravings of his senses. The second part was the Mars-normal tank in which he did his gymnastics and performed his tests, so that the architects of his new body could observe their creation at work. And the third part was a low-pressure chamber on wheels that rolled him from his private suite to his public

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display or wherever else he, rarely, had any occasion to go.

The Mars-normal tank was like a zoo cage, in which he was always on display. The rolling tank offered him nothing but waiting to be moved into something else.

It was only the little two-room suite that was officially his home that gave him any comfort at all. There he had his TV set, his stereo, his telephone, his books. Sometimes one of the graduate students or a fellow astronaut would visit with him there, playing chess or trying to talk a conversation while their chests labored and lungs pumped fruitlessly at the 7500-foot pressure. These visits he looked forward to and tried to prolong. When no one was with him he was on his own resources. Rarely he read. Sometimes he sat before the TV, regardless of what was being shown on it. Most often he "rested." That was how he described it to his overseers, by which he meant sitting or lying with his vision system in standby. It was like having one's eyes closed but remaining awake. A bright enough light would register on his senses, as it will even through a sleeper's closed lids; a sound would penetrate at once. In those times his brain raced, conjuring up thoughts of sex, food, jealousy, sex, anger, children, nostalgia, love ... until he pleaded for relief and was given a course in self-hypnosis which let him wash his mind empty.

He wished sometimes that he did know how to examine his life. He wished that he could understand his reasons for doing what he did.

Why had he volunteered for the mission?

Sometimes he tried to remember and decided he had never known. Was it because the Free World needed Martian living space? Because he wanted the glamor of being the first Martian? For the money? For the scholarships and favors it would mean for the kids? To make Brenda love him?

It probably was in among those reasons somewhere, but he couldn't remember. If he had ever known.

In any case he was committed. The thing he was sure of was that he had no way to back out now.

He would let them do whatever savage, sadistic torturing they wanted of his body. He would board the spaceship that would take him to Mars. He would endure the seven endless months in orbit. He would go down to the surface, explore, stake claims, take samples, photograph, test. He would rise up again from the Martian surface and live somehow through the seven-month return, and he would give them all the information they wanted. He would accept the

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medals and the applause and the lecture tours and the television interviews and the contracts for books.

And then he would present himself to the surgeons to be put back the way he was supposed to be.

All of those things he had made his mind up to, and he was sure he would carry them out.

There was only one question in his mind to which he had not yet worked out an answer. It had to do with a contingency he was not prepared to meet. They had told him very openly and honestly, when he first volunteered for the program, that the medical problems were complex and not fully understood. They would have to learn how to deal with some of them on him. It was possible that some of the answers would be hard to find, or wrong. It was possible that returning him to his own shape would be, well, difficult. They told him that very clearly, at the very beginning, and then they never said it again.

But he remembered. The problem he had not resolved was what he would do if, for any reason, when the whole mission was over, they could not put him back together right away. What he couldn't decide was whether he would then simply kill himself, or kill as many as possible of his friends, superiors and colleagues as well.

Chapter Four

Group of Probable Pallbearers

Roger Torraway, Col. (Ret.) USAF, B.A., M.A., D.Sc. (Hon.). At the time he woke up in the morning, the night shift finished bench-running the Cyborg's photoreceptors. There had been an unidentified voltage drop caught on the monitors when they were last in use on the Cyborg, but nothing showed in the bench test, and nothing had been visible when they were stripped. They were certified serviceable.

Roger had slept badly. It was a terrible responsibility, being custodian of mankind's last forlorn hope for freedom and decency.

When he woke up it was with that thought in mind; there was a part of Roger Torraway, which showed itself most commonly in dreams, that was about nine years old. It took all the things the President said at face value although Roger himself, doubling as diplomat and mission head, world traveler, familiar of a dozen capitals, really did not think in his conscious mind that the "Free World" existed.

He dressed, his mind in the familiar occupation of resolving a

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dichotomy. Let's assume Dash is on the level, and occupying Mars means salvation for humanity, he thought. Can we cut it? He thought of Willy Hartnett — good-looking (or he had been, till the prosthesiologists got at him). Amiable. Good with his hands. But also a little bit of a lightweight, when you came to look at him honestly. Likely to take a drink too many at the club on a Saturday night. Not to be trusted in the kitchen with another man's wife at a party.

He was not a hero, by any measure Roger could find. But who was? He cast his mind down the list of backups to the Cyborg. Number One, Vic Freibart, currently off on a ceremonial tour with the Vice President and temporarily removed from the order of succession. Number Two, Carl Mazzini, on sick leave while the leg he had broken at Mount Snow healed up. Number Three: Himself

There was no Valley Forge quality in any of them.

He made his breakfast without waking Dorrie, got the car out and left it puffing on its skirts while he picked up the morning paper, threw it into the garage and closed the door. His next-door neighbor, walking toward his car pool, hailed him. "See the news this morning? I see Dash was in town last night. Some high-level conference."

Roger said automatically, "No, I haven't looked at TV." But I did see Dash, he thought, and I could take the wind out of *your* sails. It annoyed him not to be able to say it. Security was a confounded nuisance. Half of his recent trouble with Dorrie, he was sure, came from the fact that in the neighborhood wives' morning block conference and coffee binge she was allowed to mention her husband only as a formerly active astronaut, now in administrative work. Even his trips abroad had to be played down — "out of town," "business trip," anything but, "Well, *my* husband is meeting with the Chiefs of Staff of the Basutoland Air Force this week." She had complained to Roger about it often enough. But as far as he knew, she had not broken security. Since at least three of the wives were known to report to the lab intelligence officer, he undoubtedly would have known.

As Roger got into the car he remembered that he had not kissed Dorrie good-by.

He told himself that it did not matter. She would not wake up and therefore would not know; if by any chance she did wake up, she would complain at being wakened. But he did not like to give up a ritual. While he thought about it, however, he was automatically putting the car into drive, keying his code number for the lab and

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beginning to move. He sighed, snapped on the TV and watched the Today Show all the way to work.

Fr. Donnelly S. Kayman, A.B., M.A., Ph.D., S.J. As he began celebrating the Mass in the Lady Chapel of St. Jude's, three miles away, on the other side of Tonka, the Cyborg was greedily swallowing the one meal he would get that day. Chewing was difficult because lack of practice had made his gums sore, and the saliva didn't seem to flow as freely as it should any more. But he ate with enthusiasm, not even thinking about the test program for the day, and when he had finished he gazed sadly at the empty plate.

Don Kayman was thirty-one years old, and the world's most authoritative Areologist — which is to say, specialist in the planet Mars — at least in the Free World. (Kayman would have admitted that old Parnov at the Shklovskii Institute in Novosibirsk also knew a thing or two.) He was also a Jesuit priest. He did not think of himself as being one thing first and the other with what part of him was left over; his work was Areology, his person was priesthood. Meticulously and with joy he elevated the Host, drank the wine, said the final *redempit*, glanced at his watch and whistled. He was running late. He shed his robes in record time. He aimed a slap at the Chicano alter boy, who grinned and opened the door for him.

Now in sport shirt and slacks, Kayman jumped into his convertible. It was a classic, wheels instead of hoverskirts; it could even be driven off the guided highways. But where was there to go off the highways? He dialed the laboratories, switched on the main batteries and opened his newspaper. Without attention the little car nosed into the freeway, found a gap in the traffic, leaped to fill it and bore him at eighty miles an hour to his job.

The news in the newspaper was, as usual, mostly bad.

In Paris the MFP had issued another blast at the Chandrigar peace talks. Israel had refused to vacate Cairo and Damascus. New York City's martial law, now in its fifteenth month, had failed to prevent the ambush of the 10th Mountain Division convoy trying to sneak across the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge to the relief of the garrison in Shea Stadium; fifteen soldiers were dead, and the convoy had returned to the Bronx.

Kayman dropped the paper sadly. He tilted the rearview mirror back, raised the side windows to deflect some of the wind and began to brush his shoulder-length hair. Twenty-five strokes on each side; it was almost as much a ritual with

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him as the Mass. He would brush it again that day, because he had a lunch date with Sister Clotilde. She was already half convinced that she wanted to apply for relief from certain of her vows, and Kayman wanted to resume the discussion with her as soon, and as often and as long, as suitable.

Because he had less far to go, Kayman arrived at the laboratories just behind Roger Torraway. They got out together, turned their cars over to the parking system and went up to the briefing room in the same elevator.

Deputy Director T. Gamble De Bell. As he prepared to juice up key personnel at the morning briefing, the Cyborg was 90 feet away, spread-eagled face-down and nude. On Mars he would eat only low-residue food and not much of that. On Earth it was thought necessary to keep his eliminatory system at least minimally functional, in spite of the difficulties the changes in skin and metabolism produced. Hartnett was glad for the food, but hated the enemas.

The project director was a general. The science chief was a distinguished biophysicist who had worked with Wilkins and Pauling; twenty years back he had stopped doing science and started doing figureheading, because that was where the rewards were. Neither had much to do with the work of the labs themselves, only with liaison between the operating people and those shadowy outside figures who worked the money switch.

For the nitty-gritty of daily routine, it was the deputy director who did the work. This early in the morning, he already had a sheaf of notes and reports, and he had read them.

"Scramble the picture," he ordered from the lectern, not looking up. On the monitor above him Willy Hartnett's grotesque profile broke up into a jackstraw bundle of lines, then turned into snow, then rebuilt itself into its proper features. (Only the head showed. The people in the briefing room could not see what indignity Willy was suffering, though most of them knew well enough. It was on the daily sked sheet.) The picture was no longer in color. The scan was coarser now, and the image less steady. But it was now security-safe (on the chance that some spy had tapped the closed circuit), and in portraying Hartnett the quality of the picture made, after all, very little difference.

"All right," said the deputy director, "you heard Dash last night. He didn't come here to get your votes, he wants action. So do I. I don't want any more screwups like the photoreceptor crap."

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He turned a page. "Morning progress report," he read. "Commander Hartnett is functioning well in all systems, with three exceptions. First, the artificial heart does not respond well to prolonged exercise at low temperatures. Second, the CAV system receives poorly in frequences higher than medium blue — I'm disappointed in that one, Brad," he interpolated, looking up at Alexander Bradley, the expert in the perceptual systems of the eys. "You know we're locked into UV capability on that. Third, communications links. We had to admit to that one if front of the President last night. Effectively we don't have voice link at Mars-normal pressure, and if we don't come up with a solve we'll have to go back to plain visual systems. Eighteen months down the drain."

He glanced around the room and settled on the heart man. "All right. What about the circulation?"

"It's the heat buildup," Fineman said defensively. "The heart is functioning perfectly. You want me to design it for ridiculous conditions? I could, but it would be eight feet high. Fix up the thermal balance. The skin closes up at low temperatures and won't transmit. Naturally the oxygen level in the blood drops, and naturally the heart speeds up. That's what it's supposed to do. What do you want? Otherwise he'll go into syncope, maybe short-change the brain on 0_2. Then what've you got?"

From high on the wall of the room the Cyborg's face looked on impassively. He had changed position (the enema was over, the bedpan had been removed, he was now sitting). Roger Torraway, not very interested in a discussion that did not in any way involve his specialty, was gazing at the Cyborg thoughtfully. He wondered what old Willy thought, hearing himself talked about that way. Covertly he winked at the Cyborg and gave him a thumbs-up. Hartnett did not respond. It was impossible to tell, from those faceted ruby eyes, what he saw.

"— we can't change the skin again," the integuments man was arguing. "There's already a weight penalty. If we put in any more sensor-actors, he'll feel like he's wearing a wetsuit all the time."

Surprisingly, a rumble from the monitor. The Cyborg spoke: "What theee hell do you think it feeeelsss laykk now?"

A beat of silence, as everyone in the room remembered it was a living person they were talking about. Then the skin man insisted: "All the more reason. We'd like to fine it down, simplify it, get some of the weight off. Not complicate it."

The deputy director raised his hand. "You two get together," he

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ordered the opponents. "Don't tell me what you can't do; I'm telling you what we have to do. Now you, Brad. What about that vision cutoff?"

Alex Bradley said cheerily, "Under control. I can fix. But listen, Will, I'm sorry, but it means another implant. I see what's wrong. It's in the retinal mediation system; it's filtering the extra frequencies. The system's all right, but —"

"Then make it work," said the deputy director, glancing at the clock. "How about the communications foulup?"

"Talk to respiration," said the hardware man. "If they give us a little more retained air, Hartnett can get some voice. The electronics systems are fine, there's just nothing for them to carry."

"Impossible!" shouted the lung man. "You've only left us 500 cc of space now! He uses that in ten minutes. I've gone over the drill with him a hundred times to practice conserving it —"

"Can't he just whisper?" asked the deputy director. Then, as the communications man began hauling out frequency-response curves, he added: "Work it out, will you? All the rest of you, looks good. But don't let up."

He closed the notes into their plastic folder and handed it to his assistant.

"That's that," he said. "Now let me get to the important part."

He waited for them to settle down. "The reason the President was here last night," he said, "is that a launch target has been approved. Friends, we are now on real time."

"When?" cried a voice. The deputy said:

"A.S.A.P. We've got to complete this job — and by that, friends, I mean complete it; get Hartnett up to optimum performance, so that he can actually live on Mars, no back to the workshops if something goes wrong — in time for the launch window next month. Launch time is set for oh eight hundred hours on twelve November. That gives us forty-three days, twenty-two hours and some odd minutes. No more."

There was a second's pause, then a rush of voices. Even the Cyborg's expression visibly changed, though no one could have said in what direction.

The deputy director went on: "That's only part of it. The date is fixed, it can't be changed, we have to meet it. Now I want to tell you why. Lights, please."

The chamber lights dimmed down, and the deputy's deputy, without waiting for a signal, projected a slide on the end wall of the room where all could see it, even the Cyborg in his distant cell.

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It displayed a crosshatched chart, with a broad black line growing diagonally upward toward a red bar. In bright orange letters at the top it was marked "MOST SECRET. EYES ONLY."

"Let me explain what you're looking at," said the deputy director. "The black diagonal is a composite of 22 trends and indices, ranging from the international credit balance to the incidence of harassment of American tourist by government officials abroad. The measure is of probability of war. The red bar at the top is marked 'O.H.,' which I can tell you stands for Outbreak of Hostilities.' It is not certainty. But the statistics people tell us that when the upper limit is reached there is a point-nine probability of war within six hours, and as you can see we are moving toward it."

The noise had stopped. The room was crypt-still. Finally one voice said, "What's the time scale?"

"The back data covers thirty-five years," said the deputy director. There was some easing — at least the white space at the top would have to be some months, not minutes. Then Kathleen Doughty said:

"Does it say anywhere in there who it is we're going to be at war with?"

The deputy director hesitated, said carefully, "No, that is not included in the chart, but I think we can all form our own guesses. I don't mind giving you mine. If you've been reading the papers, you know that the Chicoms have been talking about the wonders of increased food production they would bring the world by applying Sinkiang Province farming techniques to the Australian outback. Well, no matter what that quisling bunch in Canberra are willing to agree to, I feel pretty sure that this administration is not going to let the Chinks move in. Not if they want to keep my vote, anyway." He added after a moment, "That's just personal opinion, off the record, do not include it in the minlutes of this meeting. I don't know any official answer, and I wouldn't tell you if I did. All I know is what you know now. The trendline forecasts look pretty sour. Now they show nuclear escalation probabilities peaking pretty fast. We've got a date for it. The curve continued shows the point-nine probability in less than seven years.

"Which means," he added, "that if we don't have a viable Mars colony by then, we may not live to have it ever."

Alexander Bradley, B.Sc., E.E., M.D., D.Sc., Lt. Col. USMCR (Ret.). While Bradley was leaving the conference and changing from

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the expression of concern he had worn for the briefing to the more natural open-faced jollity he showed the world, the Cyborg was down-pressuring for the Mars-normal tank. His monitors were somewhat concerned. Although they could not read emotion from his face, they could from his heart, breath and vital signs, as telemetered constantly to them, and it appeared to them that he was in some sort of up-tight state. They proposed delaying the test, but he refused angrily. "Don't you know there'sss a war on, almosssst?" he demanded in shrill tones and would not answer when they spoke to him again. They decided to continue with the tests but to recheck his psych profile as soon as they were completed.

When Alexander Bradley was ten years old he lost his father and his left eye. The family was driving back from church, the Sunday after Thanksgiving. It had turned cold. The morning dew had frozen, impalpably thin and slick, in a film on the road. Brad's father was driving with great care, but there were cars in front of him, cars behind him, cars in the other half on the two-lane road going in the other direction; he was constrained to keep to a certain speed, and he was short in his answers when the rest of the family said anything to him. He was concerned. He was not concerned enough. When the disaster came he could do nothing to avert it. To Brad, sitting beside his father in the front seat, it looked as though a station wagon coming toward them a hundred yards away turned out, slowly and calmly, as though it were making a left turn. But there was no road there for it to turn into. Brad's father stepped on the brake and held it. The car slowed and slid. And for some seconds the boy sat watching the other car sliding sidewise toward them, themselves skidding gently and inevitably toward it. No one said anything, not Brad, not his father, not Brad's mother in the back seat. No one did anything, except to hold their rigid poses as though they were actors in a National Traffic Council tableau. The father sat silent and erect at the wheel, staring concentratedly at the other car. The driver of the other vehicle looked wide-eyed and inquiringly toward them over his shoulder. Neither moved until they hit. Even on the ice the friction was slowing them, and they could not have been moving at a combined velocity of much more than twenty-five miles an hour. It was enough. Both drivers were killed, Brad's father impaled, the other man decapitated. Brad and his mother, though they were wearing their safety belts, suffered fractures, cuts and bruises as well as

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internal injuries; and she lost the flexure of her left wrist forever, while her son lost his eye.

Twenty-three years later Brad still dreamed about it as though it had just happened. In his sleep it scared him witless, and he awakened sweaty and crying and gasping for breath.

It was not all loss. He had discovered considerable advantages that had been bought at the cost of an eye. Item, there was the insurance, on the life of his father and on the maiming of everyone concerned. Item, it had kept him out of the Army, and had permitted him to join the Marine Corps in an essentially civilian capacity when he wanted field experience in his specialty. Item, it had given him an acceptable excuse for avoiding the stupider risks and more tiresome obligations of adolescence. He never had to prove his courage in violent sports, always was excused from whatever parts of gym he most detested.

Biggest item of all, it gave him an education. Under the aid to handicapped children provisions of his state's welfare system, it had paid his way through school, college and graduate school. It had given him four degrees and turned him into one of the world's greatest experts on the perceptual systems of the eye.

Brad had wound up on the Man Plus project because he was the best they could get. He had chosen to work for the Marine Corps because nowhere better could one find experimental subjects prepared by shell, claymore and bolo than in the field hospitals of Tanzania, Borneo and Ceylon. That work had been noted in high echelons of the military. They had not accepted Brad, they had drafted him.

What he was not sure of was that Man Plus was the best *he* could get. Other recruits had been dragged into the space program by glamor or appeals to duty. It wasn't at all like that with Bradley. As soon as he had grasped what the man from Washington was driving at, the implications and opportunities spread out before him. It was a new track. It meant abandoning some plans, deferring others. But he could see where it would lead: Say, three years helping to develop the optic systems of the Cyborg. A world reputation coming out of it. Then he could quit the program and enter the limitless lush pastures of private practice. One hundred and eight Americans per hundred thousand had essentially total loss of function in one or both eyes. It added up to better than three hundred thousand prospective patients, every one of whom would want the best man in the field to treat him. . .

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Working on the Man Plus program would stamp him the best man in his field at once. He could have a clinic of his own before he was forty. Not big. Just big enough to be supervised personally in every detail by him and run by a staff of juniors trained by him and working under his direction. The Bradley Clinic (already it sounded as time-honored and proper as "Menninger" in his ears) would be a model for medical services all over the world, and it would make him one hell of a lot of money.

It was not Bradley's fault that the three years had extended themselves past five. It wasn't even his part of the program that caused the delays. Or not most of them, anyway. In any event, he was still young. He would leave the program with thirty good working years ahead of him — unless he chose to retire earlier, perhaps keeping a consultancy and a stock arrangement at the Bradley Clinic. And there were other advantages to working in the space program, in that so many of his associates had married such attractive women. Bradley had no interest in getting married, but he very much liked having wives.

Back in the seven-room laboratory suite where he ruled, Brad kicked ass on enough of his subordinates to insure that the new retinal mediation link would be ready for transplant within the week, and glanced at his watch.

It was not yet eleven.

He dialed Roger Torraway on the intercom and got him after a delay. "How about lunch, Rog? I want to go over this new implant with you."

"Oh, too bad, Brad. I wish I could. But I'm going to be in the tank with Will Hartnett for at least the next three hours. Maybe tomorrow."

"Talk to you then," said Brad cheerfully, and hung up. He was not surprised; he had already checked Torraway's schedule. But he was pleased. He told his secretary that he would be leaving for an outside conference and then lunch and would be back after two, then ordered his car. He fed it the coordinates for the corner of the block where Roger Torraway lived. Where Dorrie Torraway lived.

Chapter Five

Monster Becoming Mortal Again

As Brad left, whistling, his car radio was full of news of the world. The 10th Mountain Division had recoiled back to a fortified area in Riverdale. A typhoon had wrecked the rice crop in Southeast Asia. President Deshatine had ordered the U.S. delegation to walk out of the United Nations debate on

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sharing scarce resources.

There was much news that was not on the sound-only radio, because the newscasters either didn't know about it or didn't think it was important. For example, not one word was said about two Chinese gentlemen on a mission in Australia, or about the results of certain secret popularity polls the President kept locked in his safe, or about the tests being run on Willy Hartnett. So Brad didn't hear about any of these things. If he had, and had understood their importance, he would have cared. He was not an uncaring man. He was not an evil one, either. He was just not a particularly good one.

Sometimes that question came up: for instance, when it was time to get rid of a girl or drop a friend who had been helpful on the way up. Sometimes there were recriminations. Then Brad would smile and shrug and point out that it wasn't a fair world. Lancelot didn't win all the tournaments. Sometimes the evil black knight dumped him on the ground. Bobby Fischer wasn't the most lovable chess player in the world, merely the best. And so on.

And so Brad would confess that he was not a model man by social standards. Indeed he wasn't. Something had gone wrong in his childhood. The bump of ego on his skull had swollen large, so that he saw the whole world in terms of what it could give him. War with China? Well, let's see, calculated Brad, there's sure to be a lot of surgery; perhaps I'll get to head my own hospital. A world depression? His money was in farmland; people would always eat.

He was not admirable. All the same, he was the best person alive to do what the Cyborg needed, namely to provide Willy Hartnett with mediation between stimulus and interpretation. Which is a way of saying that somewhere between the external object the Cyborg saw and the conclusions the Cyborg's brain drew from it, there had to be a stage where unnecessary information was filtered out. Otherwise the Cyborg would simply go mad.

To understand why this is so, consider the frog.

Think of a frog as a functional machine designed to produce baby frogs. This is the Darwinian view, and it is really what evolution is all about. In order to succeed, the frog has to stay alive long enough to grow up and get some female frog pregnant. That means it has to do two things. It has to eat. And it has to avoid being eaten.

As vertebrates go, the frog is a dull and simple kind of creature. It has a brain, but not a big one or a very sophisticated one. There's not much excess capacity in the frog brain to play around with, so that

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one doesn't want to waste any of it on nonessentials. Evolution is always economical. Frogs do not write poems or torture themselves with fears that their female frogs may be unfaithful. Nor do they want to think about things which do not directly concern staying alive.

The frog's eye is simple, too. In human eyes there are complexities frogs know not. If a man comes into a room containing a table which bears an order of steak and French fries, even if he cannot hear, cannot taste, had lost the power of smell, he is drawn to the food. His eye turns to the steak. There is a spot on the eye called the "fovea," the part of the eye with which a man sees best, and it is that spot that directs itself toward the target. The frog doesn't do that; one part of his eye is as good as another. Or as bad. Because the interesting thing about a frog's eye view of what, for a frog, is the equivalent of a steak — namely, a bug big enough to be worth swallowing but small enough not to try to swallow back — is that the frog is blind to food unless the food *behaves* like food. Surround the frog with the most nutritious chopped-insect pate you can devise. He will starve to death — unless a ladybug wanders by.

If one thinks about how a frog eats, this strange behavior begins to make sense. The frog fits a very neat ecological niche. In a state of nature, no one fills that niche with minced food. The frog eats insects, and so insects are what he sees. If something passes through his field of vision which is the right size for an insect and moves at the proper speed for an insect, the frog does not debate whether he is hungry or not or which insects taste best. He eats it. Then he goes back to waiting for the next one.

In the laboratory this is an antisurvival trait. You can trick him with a piece of cloth, a bit of wood on a string, anything that moves properly and is the right size. He will eat them, and starve. But in nature there are no such tricks. In nature only bugs move like bugs, and every bug is frog dinner.

This principle is not difficult to understand. Say it to a naive friend and he will say, "Oh, yes, I see, the frog just ignores anything that doesn't look like a bug." Wrong! The frog doesn't do anything of the kind. He does not ignore nonbug objects, he never sees them in the first place. Tap a frog's optic nerve and drag a marble slowly past — too big, too slow — and no instrument can pick up a nerve impulse. There is none. The eye does not bother to "see" what the frog does not want to know about. But swing a dead fly past, and your meter dials flick over, the nerve transmits a message, the frog's

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tongue licks out and grabs.

And so we come to the Cyborg. What Bradley had done was to provide a mediation stage between the ruby complex eyes and the aching human brain of Willy Hartnett which filtered, interpreted and generally prepackaged all of the Cyborg's visual inputs. The "eye" saw everything, even in the UV part of the spectrum, even in the infrared. The brain could not deal with so vast a flow of inputs. Bradley's mediation stage edited out the unimportant bits.

The stage was a triumph of design, because Bradley was indeed extremely good at the one thing he was good at. But he was not there to install it. And so because Brad had a date, and also because the President of the United States had to go to the bathroom and two Chinamen named Sing and Sun wanted to try a pizza, the history of the world changed.

Jerry Weidner, who was Brad's principal assistant, supervised the slow laborious process of resetting the Cyborg's vision systems. It was a fussy, niggling sort of job, and like nearly all of the things that had to be done to Willy Harnett, it was attended with maximum discomfort for him. The sensitive nerves of the eyelid had long-since been dissected out; otherwise they would have been shrieking pain at him day and night. But he could feel what was happening. If not as pain, then as a psychically disturbing knowledge that somebody was sliding edged instruments around in a very touchy part of his anatomy. It was enough. He hated it.

He lay there for an hour or more while Weidner and the others tinkered with changes in potentials, noted readings, talked to each other in the numbers that are the language of technologists. When they were finally satisfied with the field strength of his perceptual system and allowed him to stand, without warning he almost toppled. "Sheesssst," he snarled. "Dizzzzy again."

Weidner said, worried and resigned, "All right, we better ask for vertigo checks." So there was another thirty minutes' delay while the balance teams checked his reflexes and declared themselves satisfied. But Jerry Weidner was not. The dizziness had happened before, and it had never been satisfactorily tracked down, neither to the built-in mechanical horizon or to the crude natural stirrup-and-anvil bones in his ear. Weidner did not know that it stemmed from the mediation system that was his own special responsibility, but he didn't know that it was not, either. He wished Brad would get the hell back from his long lunch.

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At that time, halfway around the world, there were these two Chinamen named Sing and Sun. They were not characters in a dirty joke. Those were their names. Sing's great-grandfather had died at the mouth of a Russian cannon after the failure of the Righteous Harmony Fists to expel the white devils from China. His father had conceived him on the Long March and died before he was born, in combat against the soldiers of a warlord allied to Chiang Kai-shek. Sing himself was nearly ninety years old. He had shaken the hand of Comrade Mao, had diverted the Yellow River for Mao's successors and was now supervising the greatest hydraulic engineering project of his career in an Australian town called Fitzroy Crossing. It was his first prolonged trip outside the territory of New People's Asia, and he had three ambitions: to see an uncensored pornographic film, to drink a bottle of Scotch that came from Scotland rather than the People's Province of Honshu, and to taste a pizza. With his colleague Sun he had made a good start on the Scotch, had found out where to accomplish the viewing of the film and was now desirous of tasting the pizza.

Sun was much younger — not yet forty — and, in spite of everything, suffering from respect for his associate's age. There was also the fact that Sun was several echelons lower in social status than the older man, although he was obviously a coming man in the techno-industrial wing of the party. Sun had just returned from a year of leading a mapping team through all of the Great Sandy Desert. It was not only sand. It was soil, good, arable, productive soil, lacking only a few trace elements and water. What Sun had mapped had been the soil chemistry of a million square miles. When Sun's soil map and Sing's great uphill aqueduct, with its fourteen great batteries of nuclear-driven pumps, came together, they would equal a new kind of life for those million miles of desert. Chemical supplements + sun-distilled water from the distant seacoast = ten crops a year, with which to feed a hundred million ethnically Chinese New Australians.

The project had been carefully studied and contained only one flaw. The Old New Australians, descendants of the populating drives of the post-World War II period, did not want New New Australians coming in to farm that land. They wanted it for themselves. As Sun and Sing entered Danny's Pizza Hut on Fitzroy Crossing's main street, two Old New Australians, one named Koschanko and one named Gradechek, were just leaving the bar and

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unfortunately recognized Sing from his newspaper pictures. Words passed. The Chinese recognized the smell of stale beer and took the truculence to be only drink; they tried to pass, and Koschanko and Gradechek pushed them out of the street door. Bellicosity began swinging, and the ninety-year-old skull of Sing Hsi-chin split itself open against a curbstone.

At this point Sun drew a pistol he was not authorized to be carrying and shot the two assailants dead.

It was only a drunken brawl. The police of Fitzroy Crossing had handled thousands of more dramatic crimes and could have handled this one, if they had been allowed to. But it did not stop there, because one of the barmaids was herself a New New Australian of Honanese extraction, recognized Sun, discovered who Sing was, picked up the phone and called the New China News Agency bureau in Lagrange Mission, down on the coast, to say that one of China's most famous scientists had been brutally murdered.

Within ten minutes the satellite network had carried a factually shaky but very colorful version of the story all over the world.

Before an hour was out, the New People's Asian mission to Canberra had requested an appointment with the foreign minister to deliver its protest, spontaneous demonstrations were in full blast in Shanghai, Saigon, Hiroshima and a dozen other NPA cities, and half a dozen observation satellites were being nudged out of their orbits to pass over Northwest Australia and the Sunda Islands seas. Two miles outside the harbor of Melbourne a great gray shape swam to the surface of the sea and floated there, offering no signals and responding to none, for more than twenty minutes. Then it declared itself the NPA nuclear submarine *The East Is Red* on a routine diplomatic visit to a friendly port. The news was received in time to cancel the RAAF air strike that had been ordered against the unknown intruder, but only just.

Under Pueblo, Colorado, the President of the United States was interrupted in his after-lunch nap. He was sitting on the edge of his bed, distastefully sipping a cup of black coffee, when the DOD liaison aide came in with a sitrep and the news that a condition red alert had been declared, in accordance with the prepared responses long-since programmed into the North American Defense Command Net. He already had the satellite reports and an on-the-scene account from a military mission to Fitzroy Crossing; he knew about the appearance of the submarine *The East Is Red* but did not yet know that the air

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strike had been called off. Summarizing the information, he said to the President, "So it's go or no-go, sir. NADCOM recommends a launch with abort options in fifty minutes."

The President snarled, "I don't feel good. What the hell did they put in that soup?"

Dash was not in a mood to think about China just at that moment; he had been dreaming about a private poll which showed his popularity down to 17 per cent, including both the "excellent" and "satisfactory" ratings, with 61 per cent calling his administration "poor" or "very unsatisfactory". It had not been a dream. That was what the morning's political briefing had shown him.

He pushed the coffee cup away and glumly contemplated the decision that he, alone in all the world, was now required to make. To launch missiles against the major cities of New People's Asia was in theory a reversible choice: they could be aborted at any time before re-entry, defused, falling harmlessly into the sea. But in practice the NPA posts would detect the launch, and who knew what those crazy Chinese bastards would do? His belly felt as though he was in the last minutes of pregnancy, and there seemed to be a good chance that he would throw up. His number-one secretary said chidingly, "Dr. Stassen did advise you not to eat any more cabbage, sir. Perhaps we should instruct the chef not to make that soup any more."

The President said, "I don't want lectures right now. All right, look. We'll hold at the present state of readiness until further orders from me. No launch. No retaliation. Understood?"

"Yes, sir," said the DOD man regretfully. "Sir? I have several specific queries, from NADCOM, from the Man Plus project, from the admiral commanding SWEPAC —"

"You heard me! No retaliation. Everything else, keep going."

His number-one secretary clarified the point for him. "Our official position," he said, "is this affair in Australia is a domestic matter and not a national concern for the U.S. Our action stance does not change. We keep all systems go, but take no action. Is that right, Mr. President?"

"Right," said Dash thickly. "Now if you can get along without me for ten minutes, I got to go to the john."

Brad did think of phoning in to see how the recalibration was going, but he really liked showering with a girl, with all the fun involved in soaping each other, and the Nine Flags bathroom armararium in-

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cluded bath-oil beads, bubbles and marvelous thick towels. It was three o'clock before he decided to think about going back to work.

By that time it was pretty much too late. Weidner had tried to get permission to postpone testing from the deputy director, who wouldn't do it on his own authority but bucked it to Washington, which queried the President's office and received the reply: "No, you cannot, positively cannot, repeat not, postpone this or any other test." The man giving the reply was the President's number-one secretary, who was looking at the "risk of war" projection on the wall of the President's most private study while he spoke. Even as he was talking, the broad black bar was bending itself still more steeply up toward the red line.

So they went ahead with the test, Weidner tight-lipped and frowning. It went well enough, until it began to go very badly indeed. Roger Torraway's mind was far away, until he heard the Cyborg call him. He locked in and stood, in skinsuit and breathing mask, on the ruddy sands. "What's the matter, Willy?" he demanded.

The great ruby eyes turned toward him. "I — I can't ssssee you, Roger!" the Cyborg shrilled. "I — I —"

And he toppled and fell. It was as quick as that. Roger did not even move toward him, until he felt a great thundering hammer of air beat in on him, sending him stumbling toward the recumbent monster form.

From the 7500-foot equivalent outside the Mars-normal chamber Don Kayman came desperately running in. He had not waited to lock. He had thrown both doors open. He was no longer a scientist. He was a priest; he dropped to his knees beside the contorted form of what had been Willy Hartnett.

Roger stared while Don Kayman touched the ruby eyes, traced a cross on the synthetic flesh, whispering what Roger could not hear. He did not want to hear. He knew what was happening.

The first candidate for Cyborg was now receiving extreme unction in front of his eyes.

The lead backup was Vic Freibart, taken off the list by presidential order.

The number-two alternate was Carl Mazzini, ruled out because of his broken leg.

The third alternate, and the new champion, was himself.

Chapter Six

Mortal in Mortal Fear

It is not an easy thing for a flesh-and-blood human being to come to terms with the knowledge

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that some of his flesh is going to be ripped from him and replaced with steel, copper, silver, plastic, aluminum and glass. We could see that Torraway was not behaving very rationally. He went blundering down the hall away from the Mars-normal tank in great urgency, as though he had a most pressing errand. He had no errand, except to get away. The hall seemed like a trap to him. He felt he could not stand to have one person come up to him and say he was sorry about Willy Hartnett, or acknowledge Torraway's own new status. He passed a men's room, stopped, looked around — no one was watching him — and entered to stand at the urinal, eyes glazed, fixed to the shiny chrome. When the door pushed open, Torraway made a great show of zipping and flushing; but it was only a boy from the typing pool who looked at him incuriously and headed for a booth.

Outside the men's room the deputy director caught him. "Goddamn lousy thing," he said. "I guess you know you're —"

"I know," said Torraway, pleased that his voice was so calm.

"We're going to have to find out what happened *fast*. I'm having a meeting in my office in ninety minutes. We'll have the first autopsy reports. I want you there."

Roger nodded, glanced at his wristwatch and turned smartly away. The important thing, he thought, was to keep moving as though he were too busy to interrupt. Unfortunately he couldn't think of a single thing he had to do, or even that he could pretend to be doing to keep conversation away. No, he recognized, not conversation; it was thought he wanted to keep away, thinking about himself. He wasn't afraid. He wasn't furious at fate; he just wasn't prepared to look into personal consequences of Willy Hartnett's death, not right at that moment —

He looked up; someone had been calling his name.

It was Jon Freeling, Brad's surgical assistant in perceptual systems, looking for Brad.

"Why, no," said Torraway, glad to be talking about something other than Willy's death or his own future. "I don't know where he is. Went to lunch, I think."

"Two hours ago. His tail's going to be in a crack if I can't find him before the DD's meeting. I'm not sure I can field all the questions — and I can't go looking for him, they're bringing the Cyborg into my lab now, and I've got to —"

"I'll find him for you," Torraway said hastily. "I'll call him at home."

"Tried it. No dice. And he didn't leave a number where he could be reached."

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Torraway winked, suddenly feeling relieved, delighted to have a challenge he could respond to. "You know, Brad," he said. "You have to remember there's a lot of tomcat in that boy. I'll find him." And he took the elevator to the administrative floor, turned two corners and rapped on the door marked *Administrative Statistics.*

The function of the people inside that door had very little to do with statistics. The door didn't open at once; instead a spy-hole opened and a blue eye looked out at him. "I'm Colonel Torraway, and it's an emergency."

"One moment," said the girl's voice; there was a sound of clattering and scraping, and then the door unlocked, and she let Torraway in. There were four other people in the room, all of them in civilian clothes and looking rather undistinguished, as they were meant to do. Each had an old-fashioned rolltop desk, of a kind one did not usually expect to see in a modern space-agency office. The tops could be pulled down to conceal what was on the desks at a moment's notice; they were down now.

"It's Dr. Alexander Bradley," Roger said. "He's needed urgently in about an hour and his department can't find him. Commander Hartnett is dead, and —"

The girl said, "We know about Commander Hartnett. Do you want us to find Dr. Bradley for you?"

"No, I'll do it. But I expect you can tell me where to start looking. I know you keep tabs on all of us, extracurricular activities and all." He did not actually wink at her too, but he heard the sound of a wink in his voice.

The girl looked at him steadily for a moment. "He's probably at —"

"Hold it," called the man at the desk behind her, his voice surprisingly angry.

She shook her head, overruling him without looking at him. "Try the Nine Flags Hover Hotel," she said. "He usually uses the name of Beckwith. I'd suggest you telephone. Maybe it would be better if we did it for you, at that —"

"Oh, no," said Torraway easily, resolute to keep this chore for himself. "It's important I talk to him myself."

The young man said strongly, "Dr. Torraway, I really suggest you let us handle this —"

But he was already backing out of the door, nodding, not listening any more. He had made up his mind not to bother telephoning but to drive to the motel; it was a valid reason to get out of the lab while he collected his thoughts.

Outside the air-controlled laboratory building, Tonka had been

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getting hotter and hotter. The sun penetrated even the tinted windshield, filling Torraway's car with heat that defied the cooling system. He drove inexpertly on manual, taking the curves so sloppily that the guidance wheels skidded. The motel was fifteen stories tall and solid glass; it seemed to aim the sunlight directly at him, like Archimedes's warriors defending Syracuse. He was glad to get out in the underground parking lot and take the moving stairs up to the lobby.

The lobby itself was as tall as the building, completely enclosed, with the rooms racked around it and flying bridges and galleries crisscrossing overhead. The clerk had never heard of Dr. Alexander Bradley.

"Try Beckwith," suggested Torraway, offering a bill. "He sometimes has trouble remembering his name."

But it was no use, the clerk either couldn't place Brad or wouldn't. Roger drove out of the parking space, paused in the heat of the sunshine and considered what to do next. Probably he should try phoning Brad at his apartment he thought. Should have done it while he was in the lobby; he didn't much want to turn around and go back in. Or call from the car, for that matter; the car phone was radio, and the conversation would be better private. He could go home and call from there, he planned; it was not more than a five-minute run —

At which point it first registered on Roger that he really ought to tell his wife what had happened.

It was not a duty he looked forward to. Telling Dorrie unfortunately implied spelling it all out to himself. But Roger had a good attitude toward inevitable things, even if unpleasant, and, keeping his mind in neutral, turned the car toward home and Dorrie.

Unfortunately Dorrie wasn't there.

He called to her in the hallway, peered into the dining room, looked at the swimming pool in the back, checked both bathrooms. No Dorrie. Out shopping, no doubt. It was annoying, but it couldn't be helped, and he was just about to leave a note for her, staring out the window while he tried to think how to phrase the note, when he saw her driving up in her micromidget two-seater.

He had the door opened for her before she got to it.

He expected she would be surprised. He had not expected that she would just stand there, her pretty eyebrows raised and motionless, her expression showing no movement at all. She looked like a snapshot of herself, frozen in the middle of a step.

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He said, "I wanted to talk to you about something. I just came from the Nine Flags, because Brad is involved too, but —"

She came to life and said politely, "Let me come in and sit down." There was still no expression on her face as she paused in the hallway to look at herself in the mirror. She smoothed some blemish on her cheek, fluffed her hair, went into the living room and sat down without taking off her hat. "It's awfully warm out today, isn't it?" she observed.

Roger sat down too, trying to collect his thoughts. It was important not to frighten her. Once he had watched a television program about how to break bad news, some shrink going on the talk shows in the hope of catching a few live ones for his waiting room. Never be blunt, he said. Give the person a chance to prepare himself. Tell it a little at a time. At that period Roger had thought it was comic; he remembered telling Dorrie about it — *Honey, have you got your charge card? Well, you'll need it for the black dress. The black dress for the funeral. The funeral we have to go to, and you'll want to look nice because of who it is. Well, after all, she was a pretty old lady. And you know she didn't drive very well. The policemen said she didn't suffer after she creamed the truck. Your father's bearing up very well.* They had both laughed about it.

"Please go ahead," Dorrie said invitingly, taking a cigarette out of the box on the coffee table. As she lit it Roger saw the butane flame quiver, and realized with astonishment that her hand was shaking. He was both surprised and a little pleased; evidently she was bracing herself for some kind of bad news. She had always been very perceptive, he thought admiringly, and now that she was ready he plunged in.

"It's Willy Hartnett, dear," he said kindly. "Something went wrong this morning and —"

He paused, waiting for her to catch up to him. She did not look concerned as much as puzzled.

"He's dead," said Torraway shortly, and stopped to let it sink in.

She nodded thoughtfully. It wasn't penetrating, Roger thought regretfully. She didn't understand. She had liked Willy, but she was not crying, or angry, or showing any emotion at all.

He finished the thought, giving up on tact: "And of course that means that I'm next in line," he said, trying to speak slowly. "The others are out of it; you remember, I told you. So I'm the one they'll want to, uh, prepare for the Mars mission."

The look on her face perplexed

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him. It was fragile and apprehensive, almost as though she had been expecting something worse and still was not sure it was not coming. He said impatiently, "Don't you understand what I'm saying, dear?"

"Why, yes. That's — well, it's a little hard to take in." He nodded, satisfied, and she went on, "But I'm confused. Didn't you start by saying something about Brad and the Nine Flags?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, I know I threw a lot at you at once. Yes. I said I had just been at the motel, looking for Brad. You see, it looks like its the perceptual systems that went wrong and killed Willy. Well, that's Brad's baby. And today of all days he took a long lunch to — well, I don't have to tell you about Brad. He's probably shacked up somewhere with one of the nurses. But it's going to look bad if he isn't there for the meeting —" He stopped to look at his watch. "Wow, I've got to get back myself. But I did want to break this to you in person."

"Thank you, honey," she said absently, pursuing a thought. "Wouldn't it have been better to phone him?"

"Who?"

"Brad, of course."

"Oh. Oh, sure, except it was sort of private. I didn't want anyone listening in. And, besides, I didn't think he'd be answering the phone. In fact, the desk clerk wouldn't admit he was ever there. And I had to go to security to get a lead on where he might be." He had a sudden thought; he knew Dorrie liked Brad, and he wondered for a half second if she was upset at Brad's immorality. The thought dismissed itself, and he burst out, admiringly, "Honey, I have to say you're taking this beautifully. Most women would be in hysterics by now."

She shrugged and said, "Well, what's the use of making a fuss? We both knew this could happen."

He ventured, "I won't look very good, Dorrie. And, you know, I think the physical part of our marriage will be down the drain for a while — even not counting the fact I'll be away on the mission for better than a year and a half."

She looked thoughtful, then resigned; then she looked directly at him and smiled. She got up to come over beside him and put her arms around him. "I'll be proud of you," she said. "And we'll have long, long lives after you get back." She ducked back as he reached to kiss her and said playfully, "None of that, you've got to get back. What are you going to do about Brad?"

"Well, I could go back to the motel —"

She said decisively, "Don't do

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it, Roger. Let him look out for himself. If he's up to something he shouldn't be, that's his problem. I want you to get back to the meeting, and — Oh, say, that's right! I'm going out again. I'll be passing quite near the motel. If I see Brad's car in the lot, I'll put a note on it."

"I didn't think of that," he admired.

"So don't worry. I don't want you thinking about Brad. With all that's coming up, we have to be thinking of you!"

Jonathan Freeling, M.D., F.A.C.S., A.A.S.M.

Jonny Freeling had been in aerospace medicine long enough to have lost the habit of dealing with cadavers. Particularly he was unused to cutting up the bodies of friends. Astronauts didn't usually leave their bodies behind when they died, anyway. If they died in line of duty, it was unlikely there would be any p.m.; the ones that were lost in space stayed there; the ones that died nearer home were usually boiled to gas in the flame of hydrogen and lox. In neither case was there anything to put on a table.

It was hard to realize that this object he was dissecting was Willy Hartnett. It wasn't as much like an autopsy as like, say, field-stripping a carbine. Except that there was blood. In spite of everything, Willy had died with a lot of wet, seeping human blood still in him.

"Freeze and section," he said, serving up a gobbet on a glass slide to his general-duty nurse, who accepted it with a nod. That was Clara Bly. Her pretty black face reflected sadness, although one could not tell, Freeling reflected, lifting out a dripping metal strand that was part of the vision circuits, how much of the sadness was over the death of the Cyborg and how much over her interrupted going-away party. She was leaving to get married the next day; the recovery room just behind that door was still festooned with crepe and paper flowers for her party. They had asked Freeling if they should clear it away for the autopsy, but of course there was no need to; no one would be recovering in that recovery room.

He looked up at his surgical assistant, standing where the anesthesiologist would have been in a normal operation, and demanded: "Any word from Brad?"

"He's in the building," she said.

Then why doesn't he get his ass down here? is what Freeling thought, but he didn't say it, only nodded. At least he was back. Whatever grief was coming because of this, Freeling wouldn't have to carry it alone.

But the more he probed and

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fished, the more he found himself baffled. Where was the grief? What had killed Hartnett? The electronic components didn't seem to be wrong; every time he removed one it was rushed off to the instrumentation people, who workbenched it on the spot. No problems. Nor did the gross physical structure of the brain give any immediate explanation ....

Was it possible that the Cyborg had died of nothing at all?

Freeling leaned back, conscious of sweat under the hot lights, instinctively waiting for his scrub nurse to wipe it off. She wasn't there, and he remembered and wiped his forehead on his sleeve. He went in again, carefully separating and removing the optical nerve system — what there was of it; the major sections had gone with the eyes themselves, replaced by electronics.

Then he saw it.

First blood seeping under the corpus callosum; then as he gently lifted and probed the gray-white slippery sheath of an artery, with a bulge that had burst. Blown. A stroke.

Freeling left it there. The rest could be done later, or not at all. Maybe it would be as well to leave what was left of Willy Hartnett as close to intact as it was. And it was time for the meeting.

The conference room doubled as the hospital library, which meant that when a meeting was going on, look-up research stopped. There were cushioned seats for fourteen people at the long table, and they were all filled, with the overflow on folding chairs, squeezed in where they could. Two seats were empty; they were for Brad and John Freeling, off on a last-minute run to the lab for final results on some slides, they said; actually so that Freeling could brief his boss on what had happened while he was "out to lunch." Everybody else was there, Don Kayman and Vic Samuelson (now promoted to Roger's backup man and not looking as though he liked it), Telly Ramez, the chief shrink, all of the cardiovascular people, muttering among themselves, the top brass from the administrative sectors — and the two stars. One of the stars was Roger Torraway, uneasily sitting near the head of the table and listening with a fixed smile to other people's conversations. The other was Jed Griffin, the President's main man for breaking logjams. His title was only Chief Administrative Assistant to the President, but even the deputy director treated him like the pope. "We can start any time, Mr. Griffin," urged the deputy director. Griffin's face spasmed a smile and he shook his head.

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"Not until those other fellows get here," he said.

When Brad and Freeling arrived, all conversation stopped as though a plug had been pulled. "*Now* we can begin," snapped Jed Griffin, and the worry to his tone was evident to everyone in the room, every one of whom shared it. We were worried too, of course. Griffin did not want to carry his worry alone and promptly shared it with everyone in the room:

"You don't know," he said, "how close this whole project is to being terminated, not next year or next month, not phased out, not cut down. *Through.*"

Roger Torraway took his eyes off Brad and fixed them on Griffin.

"Through," repeated Griffin. "Washed out." He seemed to take satisfaction in saying it, Torraway thought.

"And the only thing that saved it," said Griffin, "was these." He tapped the oval table with a folded wad of green-tinted computer printouts. "The American public wants the project to continue."

Torraway felt a clutching touch at his heart, and it was only in that moment that he realized how swift and urgent the feeling of hope that had preceded it had been. For a moment it had sounded like a reprieve.

The deputy director cleared his throat. "I had understood," he said, "that the polls showed a considerable, ah, apathy about what we were doing."

"Preliminary results, yes." Griffin nodded. "But when you add them all up and put them through the computer, it comes out to a strong, nationwide support. It's real enough. Significant to two sigmas, as I believe you people say. The people want an American to live on Mars.

"However," he added, "that was before this latest fiasco. God knows what that would do if it got out. The Administration doesn't need a dead end, something to apologize for. It needs a success. I can't tell you how much depends on it."

The deputy director turned to Freeling. "Doctor Freeling?" he said.

Freeling stood up. "Willy Hartnett died of a stroke," he said. "The full p.m. report is being typed up, but that's what it comes to. There's no evidence of systemic deterioration; at his age and condition, I wouldn't have expected it. So it was trauma. Too much strain for the blood vessels in his brain to stand."

He gazed at his fingertips. "What comes next is conjecture," he said, "but it's the best I can do. I'm going to ask for consultations from Ripplinger at the Yale Medical School and Anford —"

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"The hell you are," snapped Griffin.

"I beg your pardon?" Freeling was caught off balance.

"No consultations. Not without full-scale security clearance first. This is urgent-top, Dr. Freeling."

"Oh. Well — then I'll have to take the responsibility myself. The cause of the trauma was too many inputs. He was overloaded. He couldn't handle it."

"I never heard of anything like that causing a stroke," Griffin complained.

"It takes a good deal of stress. But it happens. And here we're into new kinds of stress, Mr. Griffin. It's like — well, here's an analogy. If you had a child who was born with congenital cataracts, you would take him to a doctor, and the doctor would remove them. Only you would have to do it before he reached the age of puberty — before he stopped growing, internally as well as externally, you see. If you don't do it by then, it's better if you leave him blind. Kids who have such cataracts removed after the age of thirteen or fourteen have, as a matter of historical record, an interesting phenomenon in common. They commit suicide before they're twenty."

Torraway was trying to follow the conversation, but not quite succeeding. He was relieved when the deputy director intervened. "I don't think I see what that has to do with Will Hartnett, Jon."

"There too it is a matter of too many imputs. In the case of the kids after the cataract operation, what appears to happen is disorientation. They get new inputs that they have not grown a system to handle. If there is sight from birth onward, the visual cortex develops systems to handle, mediate and interpret it. If not, there are no developed systems, and it is too late to grow them.

"I think Willy's trouble was that we gave him inputs for which he had no mechanism available to handle them. It was too late for him to grow one. All the incoming data swamped him; the strain broke a blood vessel. And," he said, "I think that will happen to Roger here, too, if we do the same thing with him."

Griffin turned a brief, assessing look at Roger Torraway.

Torraway cleared his throat, but said nothing. There did not seem to be anything for him to say. Griffin said, "What are you telling me, Freeling?"

The doctor shook his head. "Only what I've said. I tell you what's wrong; it's up to somebody else to tell you how to fix it. I don't think you *can* fix it. I mean, not medically. You've got a brain — Willy's, or Roger's. It has grown up as a radio receiver. Now you're

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putting TV pictures into it. It doesn't know how to deal with them."

All this time Brad had been scribbling, looking up from time to time with an expression of interest. He looked down again at his note pad, wrote something, regarded it thoughtfully, wrote again, while the attention of everyone in the room turned to him.

At last the deputy director said, "Brad? It sounds as though the ball's in your court."

Brad looked up and smiled. "That's what I'm working on," he said.

"Do you agree with Dr. Freeling?"

"No question about it. He's right. We can't feed raw inputs into a nervous system that hasn't got equipment to mediate and translate them. Those mechanisms don't exist in the brain, not in anybody's brain, unless we want to take a child at birth and rebuild him then, so that the brain can develop what it needs."

"Are you proposing that we wait for a new generation of astronauts?" Griffin demanded.

"No. I'm proposing we build mediating circuits into Roger. Not just sensory inputs. Filters, translators — ways of interpreting the inputs, the sight from different wavelengths of the spectrum, the kinesthetic sense from the new muscles — everything. Look," he said, "let me go back a little bit. Do any of you know about McCulloch and Lettvin and the frog's eye?" He glanced around the room. "Sure, Jonny, you do, and one or two of the others. I'd better review a little of it. "The frog's perceptual system — not just the eye, all of the vision parts of it — filters out what isn't important. If a bug passes in front of the frog's eye, the eye perceives it, the nerves transmit the information, the brain responds to it, and the frog eats the bug. If, say, a little leaf drops in front of the frog, he doesn't eat it. He doesn't *decide* not to eat it. He doesn't *see* it. The image forms in the eye, all right, but the information is dropped out before it reaches the brain. The brain never becomes aware of what the eye has seen, because it doesn't need to. It simply is not relevant to a frog to know whether or not a leaf is in front of it."

Roger was following the conversation with great interest, but somewhat less comprehension. "Wait a minute," he said. "I'm more complicated — I mean, a man is a lot more complicated than a frog. How can you tell what I 'need' to see?"

"Survival things, Rog. We've got a lot of data from Willy. I think we can do it."

"Have you ever done this with

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human beings?" Griffin asked.

Surprisingly, Brad grinned; he was ready for that one. "As a matter of fact, yes. About six years ago, before I came here. I was still a graduate student. We took four volunteers and we conditioned them to a Pavlovian response. We flashed a bright light in their eyes, and simultaneously rang an electric doorbell that pulsed at 30 beats a second. Well, of course, when you get a bright light in your eyes, your pupils contract. It isn't under conscious control. You can't fake it. It is a response to light, nothing else, just an evolutionary capacity to protect the eye from direct sunlight.

"That sort of response, involving the autonomic nervous system, is hard to condition into human beings. But we managed it. When it takes, it sets pretty firmly. After — I think it was after three hundred trials apiece, we had the response fixed. All you had to do was ring the bell, and the subjects' pupils would shrink down to dots. You follow me so far?"

"I remember enough from college to know about Pavlovian reflexes. Standard stuff," said Griffin.

"Well, the next part wasn't standard. We tapped into the auditory nerve, and we could measure the actual signal going to the brain: Ding-a-ling, 30 beats per second, we could read it on the oscilloscope.

"So then we changed the bell. We got one that rang at 24 beats a second. Care to guess what happened?" There was no response. Brad smiled. "The oscillospope still showed *30 beats a second*. The brain was hearing something that wasn't really happening.

"So, you see, it isn't just frogs that do this sort of mediation. Human beings *perceive* the world in predigested ways. The sensory inputs themselves edit and rearrange the information.

"So what I want to do with you, Roger," he said genially, "is give you a little help in interpretation. We can't do much with your brain. Good or bad, we're stuck with it. It's a mass of gray jelly with a capacity-limiting structure, and we can't keep pouring sensory information into it. The only place we have to work is at the interface — *before* it hits the brain."

Griffin slapped his open palm on the table. "Can we make the window date?" he demanded.

"I can but try, sir," said Brad genially.

"You can but get your ass in a crack if we buy this and it doesn't work, boy!"

The geniality faded from Brad's face. "What do you want me to say?"

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"I want you to tell me the odds!" Griffin barked.

Brad hesitated. "No worse than even money," he said at last.

"Then," said Griffin, smiling at last, "let it be so."

Even money, thought Roger on the way back to his own office, is not a bad bet. Of course, it depends on the stakes. He slowed down to let Brad catch up with him. "Brad," he said, "you're pretty sure of what you were saying?"

Brad slapped him gently on the back. "More sure than I said, to tell you the truth. I just didn't want to stick my neck out for old Griffin. And listen, Roger, thanks."

"For what?"

"For trying to warn me today. I appreciate it."

"You're welcome," said Roger. He stood there for a moment, watching Brad's retreating back, and wondering how Brad knew about something he had told only to his wife.

We could have told him — as in fact, we could have told him many, many things, including why the polls showed what they showed. But no one really needed to tell him. He could have told himself, if he had allowed himself to know.

Chapter Seven

Mortal Becoming Monster

Don Kayman was a complex man who never let go of a problem. It was why we wanted him on the project as areologist, but it extended to the religious part of his life too. A religious problem was bothering him, in the corner of his mind.

It did not keep him from whistling to himself as he shaved carefully around his Dizzy Gillespie beard and brushed his hair into a neat page-boy in front of his mirror. It bothered him, though. He stared into the mirror, trying to isolate what it was that was troubling him. After a moment he realized that one thing, at least, was his tee-shirt. It was wrong. He took it off and replaced it with a doubleknit four-color turtleneck that had enough of the look of a clerical collar to appeal to his sense of humor.

The interhouse phone buzzed. "Donnie? Are you nearly ready?"

"Coming in a minute," he said, looking around. What else? His sports jacket was over a chair by the door. His shoes were shined. His fly was zipped. "I'm getting absent-minded," he told himself. What was bothering him was something about Roger Torraway, for whom, at that moment, he felt very sorry.

He picked up his jacket, swung it over his shoulder, went down the hall and knocked on the door of Sister Clotilda's nunnery.

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"Morning, Father," said the novice who let him in. "Take a seat. I'll get her for you."

"Thanks, Jess." As she disappeared down the hall, Kayman watched her appreciatively. The tight-fitting pants-suit habit did a lot for her figure, and Kayman let himself enjoy the faint, antique feeling of wickedness it gave him. It was a gentle enough vice, like eating roast beef on Friday. He remembered his parents doggedly chewing the frozen deep-fried scallops every Friday night, even after the dispensation had become general. It was not that they felt it was sinful to eat meat, it was simply that their digestive systems had become so geared to fish on Friday that they didn't know how to change. Kayman's feelings about sex were closely related to that. When the celibacy rule was lifted, it had not taken away the genetic recollection of two thousand years of a priesthood that had pretended it didn't know what its sexual equipment was for.

Sister Clotilda came briskly into the room, kissed his freshly shaved cheek and took his arm. "You smell good," she said.

"Want to get a cup of coffee somewhere?" he asked, guiding her out the door.

"I don't think so, Donnie. Let's get it over with."

The autumn sun was a blast, hot air up out of Texas. "Shall we put the top down?"

She shook her head. "Your hair will blow all over. Anyway, it's too hot." She twisted in the seat belt to look at him. "What's the matter?"

He shrugged, starting the car and guiding it into the automatic lanes. "I — I'm not sure. I feel as if I have something I forgot to confess."

Clotilda nodded appraisingly. "Me?"

"Oh, no, Tillie! It's — I'm not sure what." He took her hand absent-mindedly, staring out the side window. As they passed over a throughway, he could see the great white cube of the project building off on the horizon.

It wasn't his interest in Sister Cotilda that was bothering him, he was pretty sure of that. Although he liked the little tingle of mild wickedness, he was not in any sense willing to flout the laws of his Church and his God. Maybe, he thought, he might hire a good lawyer and fight, but not break a law. He considered his pursuit of Sister Clotilda daring enough, and what came of that would depend on what her order allowed when and if he ever got around to asking her to apply for a dispensation. He had no interest in the wilder splinter groups, like the clerical communes, or the revived Catharists.

"Roger Torraway?"

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"I wouldn't be surprised," he said. "There's something about tampering with his senses that bothers me. His perceptions of the world."

Sister Clotilda squeezed his hand. As a psychiatric social worker, she was cleared to know what was happening at the project, and she knew Don Kayman. "The senses are liars, Donnie. That's Scripture."

"Oh, sure. But does Brad have any right to say how Roger's senses lie?"

Clotilda lit a cigarette and let him think it out. It wasn't until they were near the shopping mall that she said, "Next turnoff, isn't it?"

"Right," he said, taking the wheel and turning the car back to manual. He slid into a parking space, still preoccupied with Roger Torraway. There was the immediate problem of the man's wife. That was trouble enough. But beyond that there was the bigger problem: How could Roger deal with the greatest of personal questions — what is Right, and what is Wrong? — if the information he had to base a decision on was filtered through Brad's mediation circuits?

The sign over the shop window said PRETTY FANCIES. It was a small shop by the standard of the mall, which had a Two Guys with a quarter of a million feet of floor space and a supermarket almost as big. But it was big enough to be expensive. With rent, utilities, insurance, payroll for three salespeople, two part-time, and a generous managerial salary for Dorrie, it meant a net loss every month of nearly two thousand dollars. Roger paid it gladly, although some of our accountancy functions had pointed out to him that it would have been cheaper to give Dorrie the two thousand a month as an allowance.

Dorrie was stacking chinaware on a counter marked "Clearance Sale — Half Price." She nodded to the visitors politely enough. "Hello, Don. Nice to see you, Sister Clotilda. Want to buy some red teacups cheap?"

"They look nice," said Clotilda.

"Oh, they are. But don't buy them for the nunnery. The FDA just ordered them off the market. The glaze is supposed to be poison — provided you drink at least forty cups of tea out of one of them every day of your life for twenty years."

"Oh, that's too bad. But — you're selling them?"

"The order isn't effective for thirty days," Dorrie explained and flashed a grin. "I guess I shouldn't have told that to a priest and a nun, right? But honestly, we've been selling this glaze for years and I never heard of anyone dying."

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"Would you like to have a cup of coffee with us? Kayman asked. "In other cups, of course."

Dorrie sighed, straightened a cup into line and said, "No, we might as well just talk. Come on back to my office." She led the way and said over her shoulder, "I know why you're here, anyway."

"Oh?" said Kayman.

"You want me to go visit Roger. Right?"

Kayman sat down in a wide armchair, facing her desk. "Why don't you, Dorrie?"

"Cripes, Don, what's the use? He's out cold. He wouldn't know whether I was there or not."

"He's heavily sedated, yes. But he has periods of consciousness."

"Did he ask for me?"

"He asked *after* you. What do you want him to do, beg?"

Dorrie shrugged, fiddling with a ceramic chess piece. "Did you ever think of minding your own business, Don?" she asked.

"That's what I'm doing. Roger's our one indispensable man right now. Do you know what's happening to him? He's been on the table twenty-eight times already. Thirteen days! He doesn't have any eyes any more. Or lungs, heart, ears, nose — he doesn't even have any skin; it's all gone, a few square inches at a time, replaced with synthetics. Flaying alive — men have become saints for that, and now we've got a man who can't even have his own wife —"

"Oh, shit, Don!" Dorrie flared. "You don't know what you're talking about. Roger *asked* me not to come and see him after the surgery started. He thought I wouldn't be able to — He just didn't want me to see him like that!"

"My impression of you," the priest said thinly, "is that you're made of pretty durable stuff, Dorrie. Would you be able to stand it?"

Dorrie grimaced. For a moment her pretty face did not look pretty at all. "It isn't a question of what I can stand," she said. "Don. Look. Do you know what it's like being married to a man like Roger?"

"Why, pretty fine, I would guess," said Kayman, startled. "He's a good man!"

"He is, yes. I know that at least as well as you do, Don Kayman. And he's head over heels in love with me."

There was a pause. "I don't think I understand what you're saying," Sister Clotilda ventured. "Are you displeased by that?"

Dorrie looked at the nun consideringly. "Displeased. That's one way to put it." She set down the chess piece and leaned across the desk. "That's every girl's dream, right? To find a genuine hero, handsome, and smart, and famous,

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and pretty nearly rich — and have him so crazily in love with her that he can't see anything wrong. That's why I married Roger. I couldn't believe I was that lucky." Her voice went up a halftone in pitch. "I don't think you know what it's like to have someone head over heels in love with you. What's the good of a man who's upside-down? Do you know that when we're traveling together Roger never goes to the bathroom until he thinks I'm asleep, or when I'm somewhere else? He shaves the minute he gets up — he doesn't want me to see him with his hair messed up. He shaves his armpits, uses deodorants three times a day. He — He treats me like I was the Virgin Mary, Don! He's *fatuous.* And it's been that way for *nine years.*"

She looked beseechingly at the priest and the nun, who were silent, a little ill at ease. "And then," Dorrie said, "you come along and tell me I ought to go see him when they're turning him into something ghastly and ludicrous. You and everybody else. Kathleen Doughty dropped in last night. She had a skinfull; she'd been drinking and brooding and she decided to come over and tell me, out of her bourbon wisdom, that I was making Roger unhappy. Well, she's right. You're all right. I'm making him unhappy. Where you're wrong is thinking that my going to see him would make him happy .... Oh, hell."

The phone rang. Dorrie picked it up, then glanced at Kayman and Sister Clotilda. The expression in her face, which had been almost pleading, condensed into something like the porcelain figures on the table beside her desk. "Excuse me," she said, folding up the soft plastic petals around the mouthpiece that converted it into a hushphone and turning away from them in her chair. She talked inaudibly for a moment, then hung up and turned back to them.

Kayman said, "You've given me something to think about, Dorrie. But still —"

She smiled a porcelain smile. "But still you want to tell me how to run my life. Well, you can't. You've said your piece, both of you. I thank you for coming. I'll thank you, now, to go. There's nothing more to be said."

Inside the great white cube of the project building Roger lay, spread-eagled on a fluidized bed. He had been thirteen days like that, most of the time either unconscious or unable to tell whether he was conscious or not. He dreamed. We could tell when he was dreaming from the rapid eye movements at first, later from the twitches of the muscle endings after the eyes were gone. Some of his dreams were

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reality, but he could not distinguish between them.

We kept very close tabs on Roger Torraway every second of that time. There was hardly a flexure of a muscle or a flash of a synapse that did not kick over some monitor, and faithfully we integrated the data and kept continuous surveillance of his vital functions.

It was only the beginning. What had been done to Roger in the first thirteen days of surgery was not much more than had been done to Willy Hartnett. And that was not enough.

When all that was done, the prosthetic and surgical teams began doing things that had never been done to any human being before. His entire nervous system was revised and all the major pathways connected with coupling devices that led to the big computer downstairs. That was an all-purpose IBM 3070. It took up half a room and still did not have enough capacity to do all the jobs demanded of it. It was only an interim hookup. Two thousand miles away, upstate New York, the IBM factory was putting together a special-purpose computer that would fit into a backpack. Designing that was the most difficult part of the project; we kept revising the circuits even while they were being fitted together on the workbenches. It could not weigh more than eighty pounds, Earth weight. Its greatest dimension could not be more than nineteen inches. And it had to work from DC batteries which were kept continually recharged by solar panels.

The solar panels were a problem at first, but we solved that one rather elegantly. They required an absolute minimum surface area of nearly thirty square feet. The surface area of Roger's body, even after it had been revised with various attachments, wasn't large enough, wouldn't have been even if all of it could have been accepting Mars's fairly feeble sunlight at once. The way we solved the problem was to design two great gossamer fairy wings. "He's going to look like Oberon," Brad said gleefully when he saw the drawings. "Or like a bat," grumbled Kathleen Doughty.

They did resemble bat wings, especially as they were jet black. They would be no good for flying, even in a decently thick atmosphere if Mars had had one. They were thin film, with little structural strength. But they weren't meant for flying or for any kind of load-bearing. They were only meant to preen themselves out automatically, oriented to accept as much radiation as the sun could provide. As an afterthought, the design was changed to include a

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certain amount of control on Roger's part so he could use the wings to balance.

The solar wings were designed and fabricated in eight days; by the time Roger's shoulders were ready to accept them, they were ready to attach. The skin was almost a stock item by now. So much had been used on Willy Hartnett, both as original equipment and as replacements for damage or for design changes as the project went along, that new grafts were loomed to Roger's shape as rapidly as the surgeons flayed away the integument he was born with.

From time to time he would rouse himself and look at his surroundings with what seemed recognition and intelligence. It was hard to be sure. His visitors — he had a constant stream of them — sometimes spoke to him, sometimes came to regard him as a laboratory specimen to be discussed and manipulated with no more person-to-person concern than they would give a titration flask. Vern Scanyon was in almost every day, staring at the developing creation with growing repugnance. "He looks like hell," he grumbled. "The taxpayers would love this!"

"Watch it," snarled Kathleen Doughty, interposing her body between the director and the subject. "How do you know he can't hear you?"

Scanyon shrugged and left to report to the President's office. Don Kayman came in as he was going. "Thanks, mother to all the world," he said gravely. "I appreciate your concern for my friend Roger."

"Yah," she said irritably. "It's not sentiment. The poor sod's got to have some self-confidence; he's going to need it. You know how many amputees and paraplegics I've worked with? And do you know how many of them were certified basket cases, that would never walk or move any muscle or even go to the toilet by themselves? It's will power that does it, Don, and for that you need to believe in yourself."

Kayman frowned; Roger's state of mind was still very much in his thoughts.

"Are you arguing with me?" Kathleen said sharply, misreading the frown.

"Not in the least! I mean — be reasonable, Kathleen; am I the man to question the transcendence of the spiritual over the physical? I'm just grateful. You're a good person, Kathleen."

"Oh, crap," she grumbled around the cigarette in her mouth. "That's what they pay me for. And besides," she said, "I take it you haven't been in your office yet today? There's a buck-up note for all of us from His Starship the General, so we won't forget how

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important what we're doing is ... and a little hint that if we blow our launch date we're for the concentration camps."

"As if we needed reminding," sighed Father Kayman, looking at Roger's grotesque and unmoving figure. "Scanyon's a good man, but he tends to think whatever he does in the very center of the universe. Only this time he might be right ...."

It was at least a colorable claim. To us, there was not much question about it: the most important link in all the complex interrelationships of mind and matter than an earlier generation of scientists had called Gaia was right there, floating on its fluidized bed, looking like the star of a Japanese horror flick. Without Roger Torraway, the Mars launch could not take off on time. Billions of people might question the importance of that. We did not.

There was Roger at the hub of everything. Around him, in the bulk of the project building, there were all the ancillary and associated efforts that were going into making him what he had to be. In the surgery room next door, Freeling, Weidner and Bradley tinkered new parts into him; down in the Mars-normal tank where Willy Hartnett had died those parts were bench-tested in the Martian environment to failure. Sometimes failure time was appallingly short; then they were redesigned if possible, or backed up — or, sometimes, used anyway, with crossed fingers and prayers.

The universe expanded away from Roger, like the shells of an onion. Still farther in the building was the giant 3070, clicking and whirring as it accreted new segments of programming to match the mediation facilities being built into Roger hour by hour. Outside the building was the community of Tonka, which lived or died by the health of the project, its principal employer and major reason for being. All around Tonka was the rest of Oklahoma, and spreading out in all directions the other fifty-four states, and around them the troubled, angry world that was busy snapping arrogant notes from one of its capitals to another on the policy level, and clawing for subsistence in each of its myriad personal lives.

The project people had come to close themselves off from most of that world. They didn't watch the television news when they could avoid it, preferred not to read anything but the sports sections of the newspapers. In high gear, they did not have a great deal of time, but that wasn't the reason. The reason was that they simply did not want to know. The world was going mad, and the isolated strangeness in the great white cube of the

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project building seemed sane and real to them, while the rioting in New York, the tac-nuke fighting around the Arabian Gulf and the mass starvation in half of what used to be called the "emerging nations" seemed irrelevant fantasy.

They were fantasy. At least, they did not matter to the future of our race.

And so Roger continued to change and survive. Kayman spent more and more time with him, every minute he could spare from the supervision of the Mars-normal tank. He watched with affection as Kathleen Doughty stumped around the room, dropping cigarette ashes on everything but Roger. But he was still troubled.

He had to accept Roger's need for mediation circuits to interpret the excess of inputs, but he had no answer for the great question:

If Roger could not know what he was seeing, how could he see Truth?

(*To be continued next month.*)

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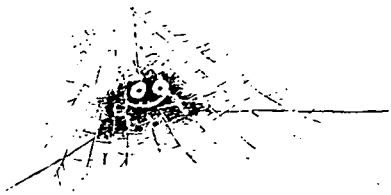
THE DARK CORNER



It is a pleasure to be able to lead off this Dark Corner with an announcement which is bound to create so much pleasure, namely that — and of course it is at last — we have among us *Lovecraft at Last* (Carrollton Clark, 9122 Rosslyn, Arlington, Va. 22209 $19.75 the Deluxe Standard Edition, $30.00 for what are left of the Collectors' Edition in slip cases) by Willis Conover. The first I heard of the project was an ad occupying the entire back page of the Fall 73 issue of the brave but doomed second coming of *Weird Tales* (I hope I am not the one to inform you this revival did not survive). The ad was full of complicated information printed in small type and took minutes to read, but the gist of it was that *At Last* made available important Lovecraftian material never printed before; that a free facsimile of HPL's last manuscript was offered (his final working of *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, which can presently by purchased for $5.00 from the publishers) if you would but clip, fill out and mail the

GAHAN WILSON
Books

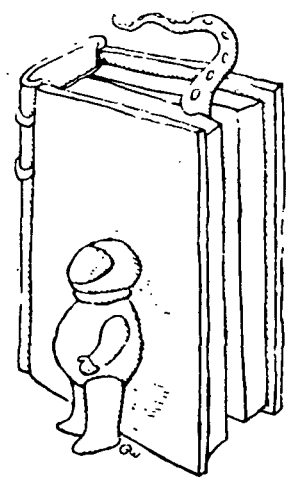
Lovecraft At Last, Willis Conover, Carrollton Clark, $19.75 & $30.00.

Xelucha and Others, M. P. Shiel, Arkham House, $6.50.

Beneath the Moors, Brian Lumley, Arkham House, $6.00.

The Great White Space, Basil Copper, St. Martin's, $6.95.

The Watchers Out of Time, Arkham House, $8.50.



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coupon provided, and that all monies would be refunded if the buyer expressed dissatisfaction within fifteen days of receipt of the book. The years between have seen a flurry of handsomely printed apologies for delay, the promised *Supernatural Horror* (looking for all the world like four actual pages of yellow sheet typed with Lovecraft's ancient machine, badly needing cleaning, and spidery additions in his hand), and now, at last, *At Last*. It has been worth the wait.

The book is not, nor does it pretend to be, a work of scholarship. It does not presume to psychoanalyze Lovecraft's private motivations, nor reveal to a startled world what actually ailed his father (*I* know, by the way — the old fellow was slowly turning into a frog!), nor does it attempt anything like a full biography. What it does do, and beautifully, is convey what it is like — I use the present tense on purpose as Conover has built a kind of time machine — to be a fifteen year old kid who, by a touching combination of brass and naivete, has activated a regular correspondence between himself and the awesome HPL. Conover was involved with the production of one of those amateur publications devoted to fantasy, bless their hearts, and he figured it would be a swell idea if he could get some of the more towering professionals in the field to contribute, say, for example, Howard Phillips Lovecraft. He sent a nervy letter of inquiry off to Providence and got back a generous and sympathetic reply. Staggered, fifteen year old kids do have some contact with reality, he wrote again and again was answered, and so the material for this delightful volume grew, postcard by postcard and letter by letter. Now thanks to Conover's loving, painstaking labors — the delay in publication is amply explained by a glance through his book — we can share his experience.

The layout and development are, I think, unique. You read this or that letter in print, or read a reference to such and such a Christmas card, and there, right next to the quote or description, is the card or letter itself! I have no idea how Conover managed to get, say, the ink colors so flawlessly reproduced, I expect patient dedication had a good deal to do with it, but the effect is so completely convincing that collectors in this area are advised to tread cautiously lest they find themselves spending small fortunes for clippings from this book. As the correspondence proceeds the characters lose shyness by degrees and confidences mount and you are presented with a moving and extra-

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ordinarily encouraging look at a maturer and healthier Lovecraft than has been heretofore presented. He has fought and won through so much that plagued him during his earlier years, and his comments on that suffering younger self make fascinating reading. But I think I'd best leave off describing what happens further and leave it to you to read it page by page and impact by impact. We have seen books of varying quality representing varying research into Lovecraft's life and work. As his legend and influence inevitably grow, we'll see many more. The newer ones will supersede and render obsolete the older, profound interpretations tending to get more complicated as they go along, but *Lovecraft at Last* will, I believe, remain with us for it is no third hand interpretation, above all no explanation — it is Lovecraft himself, and his young, awed admirer, and they're both alive.

Another book which has been looming for some time and has finally joined us is *Xelucha and Others* by M. P. Shiel (Arkham House, $6.50). Shiel is, of course, one of the very best. He is most famous for his novel *The Purple Cloud*, but a number of his short stories have been heavily anthologized and are well known. *The House of Sounds, Huguenin's Wife* and *The Pale Ape* fit into this category, and these are represented in this collection, but there are a number of others much less familiar and well worth your time if you have not yet come across them. The title story is an excellent example of Shiel's knack for decadence and is highly informative regarding the dietary customs of graveyard worms. Shiel is always disturbing, but I found one of these, *The Primate of the Rose*, bad enough to give me quite a nasty little dream. Now, hopefully, they'll get on with the long promised collection of *Prince Zaleski*!

Brian Lumley has a new book out with Arkham House (*Beneath the Moors*, $6.00) which, I am relieved to say, is quite good — really by far the best thing he's done. I'll admit to being a little worried about him after getting through *The Burrowers Beneath* (Daw Books, 95¢), which was tiring to read and must have been exhausting to write. The thing never came to life, and though there was continuous and strenuous tugging at the hawsers, poor Lumley never seemed to be able to get the damned thing pulled together. The exercise must have done him good, however, because after a slightly faltering start, he lopes easily from page to page and carries the reader effortlessly to a really dandy climax featuring a statement by a fellow named

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Williamson which is as grand a sample of a solid, down-to-earth mind colliding with the Ghastly Impossible and struggling to grasp what in hell happened since Bram Stoker utilized the same strategy in Dracula. Mr. Lumley is coming along well. Also there is a highly successful underground horrorland which is solid, consistent, and well designed to give you a bit of a turn, even several in a row.

The back of the jacket of Basil Copper's *The Great White Space* (St. Martin's Press, $6.95) contains high praise for the author by a number of formidable folk, the copy encourages expectation of high Lovecraftian fun, the cover art is intriguing, and so I settled down with a happy sigh to have a good, ghastly read, but did not. Copper has the thesis down, alright, but doesn't seem to know what to do with it. His scientists travel through strange places in wonderful machines, they come across huge and ancient artifacts, hear flapping wings, disinter weird creatures which instantly rot, and do all the other fine, traditional things we all enjoy so much, but none of it ever adds up to a meaningful whole which makes the entire thing an exercise in frustration. Perhaps the promise of excellent moments here and there is what makes it such a dissappointing book.

I think my public record is very clear concerning August Derleth, that I hold him in the highest respect and my gratitude to him for his work with Arkham House truly knows no bounds, so the reader will understand that when I got a copy of *The Watchers Out of Time* (Arkham House, $8.50) and an angry letter concerning the book from Donald Wandrei almost in the same mail, I found myself faced with a painful decision. Mr. Wandrei's thesis is that it is time, past time, to give up pretending the stories in this book which are attributed to the authorship of Lovecraft and Derleth are anything of the sort, and that the idea they are actually collaborations simply isn't so. The forward to the book, written sympathetically by April Derleth, lays out the facts as they stand, that Derleth took the tiniest Lovecraftian fragments as springboards for his *pastiches*, but then refers to the stories as the result of teamwork. What has happened, thanks almost entirely to the efforts of Derleth and Wandrei, is that, freed from oblivion, HPL has become just too important a figure for these goings on. There are many arguments for Derleth having written the tales, the most important being he obviously enjoyed doing that sort of thing enormously and was good at it, as witness Solar Pons; another is that at crucial points the combination of

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the names Lovecraft *and* Derleth helped to make money to help finance the laudable doings at Arkham House. But the time has passed, the effort was a success, and I suspect Mr. Derleth himself, who was a very astute and practical man, and an artist who had many more important things going for him than these minor exercises, would agree that henceforth the pieces should really be billed as being his own, and merely based on the notes and letters of Lovecraft, and on the Lovecraftian mythos as he saw it, and no more than that.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Dreams Must Explain Themselves, Ursula K. LeGuin, Algol Press. $3.00. An article and story by LeGuin, along with her National Book Award acceptance speech and an interview with LeGuin by Jonathan Ward. Available from Algol Press. P.O. Box 4175, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Science Fiction Books Published in Britain, 1972 & 1973, Gerald Bishop, Aardvark, $2.00. An index, by author and title. Available (along with other indexes) from Joanne Burger, 55 Blue Bonnet Ct., Lake Jackson, Tx. 77566.

Cliffs Notes on Heinlein's Stranger In A Strange Land & Other Works, Baird Searles, Cliffs Notes, $1.25. Critical discussion of Heinlein's work, along with a short life of the author and selected bibliography. Available from Cliffs Notes, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501.

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Sonya Dorman returns with a first-rate sample of "inner space" sf, in this case a story about mind-control: a terrifying domestic drama which seems a swing of the pendulum ahead of most sf on this theme.

Them and Us and All

by SONYA DORMAN

Margaret, tall, fair, with two vertical tension lines between her reddish brows, leaned toward her mirror to clip on the green earrings.

From the other room, Jack called, "Are you ready to leave now?"

"Soon. There's no hurry, we're always the first to arrive at parties, they'll find us boring."

Margaret brushed her hair, gazing at the picture of the children, taken four years ago. Eddie, at eight years, Martha at twelve, sitting on the living room floor. Eddie was lying in his sister's lap, playing with a strand of her long, fair hair. Their look of adoration and happiness together was caught forever in the snapshot. Margaret hoped it would, indeed, last forever, but she knew that nothing did, not good times, or bad; not work or parties; not even governments. The children were still beautiful together, closely bonded, trusting, usually in each other's company.

"You're lovely," Jack said, coming in.

She turned around to him and their eyes met, reassuring, comforting. "Where are the children?" She asked.

"They went to visit friends, said they'd be home before we leave."

Jack and Margaret always knew where their children were, or so they said to each other, but lately their saying so only confirmed secret fears that it wasn't true. So many of their friend's children had become involved in the illegal Alpha Clubs, and last year the Ramsey boy had been clinkered, a terrifying incident in their world. But how else, they all asked each other, how else can the kids cope with today's massive mess, bad, inadequate foods, repressive laws? How can we ourselves cope with them, was the unspoken question among the adults. Nevertheless, secret sympathy for illegal behavior

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got you nowhere but clinkered, Margaret knew. What was important was to reassure the children, to keep them looking straight ahead to a good, sound future, and not let the ambiguities leak into the family strength and dilute it.

There was a heart-rending cry from the apartment next door, followed by crashing noises. In the mirror, Margaret and Jack exchanged glances. The Bedfords were at it, again. A month before, their nerve pill allotment had been canceled, for lack of payment to the drug center, and they were now falling apart. The two boys had already left home; the neighbors were obliged to listen nightly to the noise of a collapsing world, only a paperwall thickness away. It was frightening, for it might happen any day to any of them.

Jack sighed deeply. They exchanged another glance. "Do you think we should help?" he asked Margaret, not for the first time.

"I don't know. Do we dare? I'm so sorry for them and wish we could help. But will it be misinterpreted?"

"How could anyone tell it was us?" he asked.

"I expect the Bedfords would know. And is it right? Do we have a right, even if we mean to help? I'm afraid it may anger them, and they may take it as interference. I am sorry for them but I don't want to break any laws."

"What can we do, darling, pound on the wall and yell at them to shut up?"

"No! We can't use that kind of force to suppress people. They'd have every right to call police."

"Then let's anonymously donate a couple of pills."

After a moment's hesitation, Margaret said, "All right." She unlocked the drawer at the bottom of the tall 'mica chest, took out the small brown bottle, shook loose four pale yellow tablets. Jack palmed them and left the room. He would slip them, twisted in paper, through the message unit to the Bedfords' place, and no one would ever know. Except, perhaps, the Bedfords themselves, with whom Jack and Margaret had once been on very friendly terms. It would give them a respite, maybe permit them time to get things under control.

"I hate the word 'control,'" Margaret muttered to herself, though the words tasted hypocritically bad in her mouth.

All forms of mind control, chemical, metaphysical, or electronic, had been outlawed ten years ago when the government found that such a high proportion of the citizens were developing personal control of their lives and destinies that politicians could no longer predict how their constituents would behave. Even the children were meditating in the classrooms.

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Living rooms boasted alpha machines, the wiring incorporated into the housing's standard units.

The first professionals to fall on evil times were the pyschiatrists and soon after, the ministers; then all down the line of professional control: fashion designers, boards of education, beauty operators, automobile salesmen, kitchen appliance designers. Jack and Margaret had been one of the first couples to plan their children's education and tutor them at home, training Martha to teach her young brother. The new laws put a stop to that; only a licensed teacher in an accredited school was permitted to teach.

"All gone," Margaret sighed, listening to the silence that now came from next door. Whether the Bedfords had already seized on their gift of nerve pills, or whether they had dropped exhausted in their living room, she couldn't tell. She locked the drawer where she kept the pills. The only legal assistance allowed one's frazzled nerves, the "nodders" more often than not had no effect anyway, even though they cost half a week's credits.

Jack came back in, smiling a little. "Okay. Everything is okay, now."

They heard Eddie and Martha come in. Margaret took her cape from the little closet, and when she went into their other room, saw Jack with the children sitting on the day bed. Eddie had twined an arm around his father's neck; Martha was sitting on the floor as she loved to do. They almost looked posed for another picture, Margaret thought, feeling her heart run over with love for them. They were all three so beautiful; she wanted so much happiness for them.

The children kissed their parents, complained, as usual, about the toasties they were allowed for dinner and carelessly, in that forgetful way children had, left off complaining and settled down to a board game before Jack and Margaret were even out the door.

After their parents had left the two rooms, Martha got up from the floor and pulled her half of the day bed out from under the top part and wheeled it into place against the other wall. Eddie sat cross-legged on his bed, not forgetting to take off his shoes first, and Martha sat across the room from him. Both were relaxed, their hands limp in their laps, eyes closed.

"I see a castle," Martha said.

"I see a castle, too," Eddie responded.

It was the whispered ritual beginning of their mindlink, a technique taught them by Billy MacReady, who said he didn't care if he got clinkered or not. At first,

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Eddie and Martha had been too scared to join, but Billy and his brother had been mindlinking since they were babies, and once Eddie and Martha had found courage enough to join, and discovered how beautiful and free it felt, there was no stopping.

"I see a crow in the tree by the castle," Martha said.

"I see a big, black bird in the willow by the castle wall," Eddie replied.

Then, they became silent, the need for words quickly gone. Their faces glowed, lips curved in half smiles, as the mind-world grew larger, spread out, linking with Billy and his brother down the street, with Hans and Marie on the avenue. All over the town, children trained by other children, some of them hooked to alpha machines, some of them controlling without electronic assistance, all loosening, going out to each other, free. They linked in the babies, the kindergarteners, the teeners, forming a tremendous network of radiating silence that contained the muggy, dense air, the commercial bludgeoning, politicians' spiels, red and yellow plastic toys with breakable backs.

Intensely engaged, Martha and Eddie didn't hear anyone at their door, which was, of course, locked, bolted, chained, and set with alarms by their outgoing parents. But if anyone, if neighbors, wanted to peer in through the message unit by using a long plastic tube of the kind food powders came in, it would be easy to do and would make little sound, if any. Less sound than a plastic message card sliding through.

By the time they reached the Copleys, Margaret and Jack were reasonably tense. The public transit was guaranteed to irritate, if nothing worse. It was the irritated, annoyed citizen who kept in touch with his political representative; tension opened the mind to communications from the city fathers and, properly handled, real rage and frustration could move mountains, not to mention build roads, pay taxes, and provide ladders for people to struggle upward on.

In any event, as Margaret and Jack knew, there was no point in going to a party as they did almost every night, unless you were alert and on your toes. You could hardly enjoy a group of people getting together for fun, if you relaxed in a deep chair in the corner.

When Sandy Copley opened the door to them, the tube was going full blast, the Vanderwanders had already arrived and were drinking boo-boo with green cubes, and Marty Copley was still in his socks, or perhaps he planned to go

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without shoes all evening. He often did a wild thing like that just to give them conversation matter. He was covering seaweed triangles with a cheese-flavored calcium spread and laying them in gorgeous patterns on Sandy's good platter.

Looks like a fine start to the evening, Margaret thought. Somehow the Copleys always served interesting things to eat on a minimum of ration stamps.

Jack thought that if he weren't careful, he might yawn, and as he already had a reputation for rudeness, he'd better be careful. He genuinely liked the Copleys and didn't want to make trouble for them. If he could wind himself up, perhaps with a double boo-boo? "Here you go," his host said, giving him a glass full.

Another couple came in, and soon the room was full of people, the decibels rising with the spirits, the tube broadcasting music and news, the boo-boo glasses leaving their white rings on the absorbent furniture. Already weary, Jack watched an end table drink up a white ring under the sweating base of Margaret's glass, and when he raised his eyes, he saw the white ring of Margaret's face appear to be absorbing itself, puckered in toward the mouth at the center, as if all the energy she generated were collapsing to her interior. He blinked, the delusion vanished, but he suspected he had seen an image of the unease he was feeling.

I am absolutely going to have a wonderful time, Margaret said to herself. But for some reason, she was haunted by the Bedfords and their ill fortune. And guilt for what she had done, though people did try to help each other out. But it had become terribly difficult to understand the difference between help and interference, between responsiblility and officiousness, between honesty and illegality. Yet she must try, if only for the children's sake; if she did not try to understand these things, she couldn't possibly help them grow up to be happy and honest people.

"A new theater," Sandy was saying. "We're going to open with *The Life of Betsy Green*; you ought to come." She was always asking her friends to support one of the plays she directed.

"Those plays are all the same," a man complained. "A lot of crap about moral equivocation."

Sandy's enthusiasm wasn't dampened. "But that's a burning issue, these days. And this play's got real tension, it's tight as a drum from first act to curtain, the pace is terrific, you won't breathe until it's over. It's about this woman who's a medic...."

Margaret stopped listening. She was troubled and knew that next morning she'd have to call her

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therapist for an immediate session. I don't know what's wrong with me, she thought, and looked at Jack for comfort. Their eyes met. Both realized they were equally troubled, touched by something mysterious and frightening they couldn't understand. The best they could do in the middle of the roaring group was exchange the look of love, even of hope, whether there was hope or not. To touch each other this way, though separated by a swirl of noisy people, was all they could do for each other at the time. Whatever question they sensed had been posed them, their instinctive response was to turn to each other.

"But the electrode has become *embedded*," Sandy said, still telling the play's plot to her restless audience, "because, you see, the boy has done nothing but turn down the waves until he's able to sit still for a whole hour."

A moment later, Jim Vanderwander said he thought it a good thing the plays were closed to children. "There's no reason why they should be exposed to these questions, it only confuses them," he said.

Another person argued half-heartedly, "But our kids all know about the Alpha Clubs, it's no secret. Maybe they should be allowed to see the stories and talk about them."

Someone else said wearily, "Oh, you have to keep their minds off it, if you can. I keep my children much too busy with projects for them to have time to get into mind trouble, and I don't believe in discussing it with them. They'll think I condone some form of it."

Marty Copley promised them a surprise at the end of the evening. When they questioned him avidly, he just smiled and said, "You wait and see, this one's a big surprise." So they were all put into a wonderful state of apprehension and anticipation long before anything unusual could happen.

Did the Bedfords object to having the pills offered? Margaret wondered. Was it the right thing to do? Would they resent it, as interference? People were so touchy about their privacy, as they had to be in today's nonprivate world. If the Bedfords resented it, would they retaliate in any way? She was growing more confused by the moment, just as Jack was; confused, distracted, troubled; caught between what might or might not be the right thing to do for their own children, and the decent, useful thing to do for friends.

"I'm not having enough fun, Margaret thought, and refilled her boo-boo glass, though she was bored with the stuff, party after party, a cold glass of rev-juice. Perhaps Marty's surprise would

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pull her out of this mood.

Sandy was still talking about the new play. "It shows clearly how important our individual freedom is," she said. "And how we're naturally a society of doers, our strength is in getting the necessary things done. We have real problems to tackle now, and that's what everyone wants to hear about. Reality. How to educate all the children, and protect our rights, and keep the government solvent."

Margaret had never before experienced this sensation of fading in and out, as if she were a tube screen and something interfered with reception. Or was it that she intermittently received some secret and strange message? It kept touching her, pulling her down from the tension high she was trained to achieve and retain.

Jack sat down next to her for a moment and put his lips to her cheek affectionately. He whispered, "I'm feeling terrible, let's not stay late."

"Me, too," Margaret replied. With all the noise in the room, she wondered why they lowered their voices. Habit, perhaps. Personal things always exchanged in an undertone, not to inflict them on others. She kept sliding down into a trough of dark quiet, as if pulled into it by some force, no matter how hard she tried to get into the right spirit. Not all the boo-boo in the world seemed to help. When she looked across the room, there was a woman whose name she couldn't remember, sitting with eyes closed and a dreadful withdrawn expression on her face, as if she were alone. Margaret recognized it was a reflection of her own feelings. This frightened and upset her even more.

She thought Marty Copley would never get around to his surprise.

At last, Sandy Copley walked around dimming the lights. Marty went to the wall cabinet, pulled out something, rolled it into the cleared center of the room. A stunned silence fell on the party. Even the music seemed to fade. There, on a wheeled metal cart, stood an alpha machine, stripped of its view screen, graphs, and other medical appurtenances. Indrawn breaths sounded. Someone said, "Trouble!"

"Marty, you can't," a woman yelled. "I'm going to leave now. If they catch us, we'll all be clinkered."

"Nobody's going to catch us, don't you know half the parties in town are doing this right now?" Marty said.

Margaret had heard that often. When she looked around at her friends, she was ashamed of her naivete, for there were so many smug, knowledgeable faces.

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They've all done this before, she thought, humiliated, deeply pained. And she had thought she knew what life was all about and understood her friends as well as herself. She looked again at the machine. A great longing opened like a colorful fan inside her heart.

Just to try it, she thought, and to feel, once again, as she had in the old times, at rest, peaceful, satisfied, quiet; all the dangerous emotions that damaged their society and led to apathy and breakdown. Bad, bad, bad, rang the conditioned alarms in her mind, in Jack's face, even in the faces of those who knew what it was all about. Even though Margaret knew the response had been conditioned in her, she felt its barbs go right through her heart.

"Who's first?" Marty asked.

Margaret imagined herself hooked to the machine in front of all of them: naked, open, alone. She shuddered. One couple got up and left without saying a word. Delicious whispers ran through the group. "Oh, wicked me!" "You go first." "I don't dare."

"I'll do it," Sandy said, and they applauded her as if she were on stage. She sat down in a straight chair, and Marty fixed the metal band to her forehead. Her dark curls flopped into place, covering the band. A little sweat came out on her upper lip. The people leaned slightly toward her from their chairs or standing positions around the room, hungry to see what happened, scared and tantalized, making the room's atmosphere so tense it crackled.

The machine gave off a faint, small hum. Sandy's clenched fists slowly opened. Her lower lips drooped a little. A tiny bead or bubble of saliva appeared at the corner of her mouth. The nervous flicker of her eyelids ceased, and they looked as peaceful as a sleeping baby's. On the watchers' faces, desire and fright struggled. They were all old enough to remember how it was, once, when a person could sink down peacefully into a daydream, the mind wandering even to the stars, the conscience in abeyance.

Margaret thought how beautiful Sandy was, and she yearned toward the other woman, her experience, her silence. Sandy now seemed the perfect and ultimate shape of the heart's desire, to be loved, to be touched, to be cherished, like an image of the self.

I'm going to try it, Margaret promised herself, and reached for Jack's hand, which met hers halfway. He knows how I feel, she thought gratefully. They gripped hands; melted into each other's psyches, a feeling as strong as sexual intimacy or holding each other tightly in the face of death.

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When Sandy was released from the alpha machine, she rose quietly and went into the other room. Jim Vanderwander gamely offered to handle the machine while Marty used it.

"You first," Marty told him, and Jim sat in the straight chair. Before the band was fixed in place, the door alarm began to flash. Like clockwork, Marty switched off the machine, wheeled the cart into the wall cabinet and closed the doors, while his friends went round the room refilling glasses and turning up the music and news.

It was only someone from down the hall, wanting to borrow half a dozen degradable glasses, but everyone was scared and Jack said, "I've had enough, Margaret. Haven't you, too?"

She went to Marty and made their excuses. Several others did the same. Downstairs, they dispersed in different homeward directions. Jack and Margaret chose to walk a little way to the transit station, hand in hand, mulling over the series of experiences. They spoke in reflection phrases now and then.

Jack murmured, "I can understand the kids."

"Yes. So tempting, no wonder it's illegal," Margaret said.

"Better to outlaw the whole idea, I suppose."

A police pulled up at the corner near the station. Three armored men leaped out, ran into the building; red lights flashed a warning. Plastered against a wall, Jack and Margaret waited, hands together, sweating, trying to be invisible. In a couple of minutes, the police brought out three teeners. One of them was clinkered right there, and a disposal unit popped out of a manhole and took away the little pile of char and ashes. The other two were hustled into the police and driven away.

Shaking, parched, clinging together, they ran for the station and plunged down the steps to their transit. Neither of them could say a word. Is it worth it, Margaret kept thinking, in time to the engine that throbbed them along their route. Is it worth it, oh, is it worth it? Before her inward gaze hung Sandy's face, her silence, her being, her own self, made in all their images, forbidden and lovely. The transit's dull roar, familiar as it was, made her neck ache.

They keyed and printed open their locks. As Jack stepped in, they heard a slight noise, and in the dim night light Margaret saw a dull, translucent square glowing on the floor. She glanced at the children, both asleep, and bent over to pick up the message.

FILTHY CONTROLLERS
DECENT PEOPLE HATE YOU

In the greenish light, Margaret could see Eddie's eyes dream-

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moving under the pale lids. Marth slept with an arm thrown across her face. "What shall we do?" Jack asked, his hands trembling. Margaret's hands shook, too, as she touched him.

Jack moved quietly to the children, woke them, helped them struggle to their feet, and held them in his arms. "What did you do while we were gone?" he asked.

Eddie and Martha exchanged glances sleepily. "Nothing," Martha said. "Playing," Eddie said.

"No, tell us the truth," Margaret demanded.

Martha looked across the room at her mother, and in her look there was such a mixture of happiness and trouble that Margaret ran and took her daughter in her arms. "Control?" Margaret whispered. "Were you playing a control game?"

Jack picked his son up in his arms, though Eddie was a stocky boy, not that easy any more to carry. There were tears on Jack's face. Eddie reached out with one finger and wiped the tears gently away. "It's all right, Dad. We all do it, every kid I know."

"How long have you been at it?" Jack asked, setting Eddie back on his feet, though they continued to hold hands. The group of four stood close together in the small room, as if the walls might squash them flat.

Martha said, "All our lives. All the children. You do, too."

Horrified, Jack said, "No, never, any more, since the laws. And we tried to protect you."

"How can you?" Eddie asked. "It's as natural as breathing, to touch each other, to love each other. You can't make laws against it. Like trying to make laws against water, and it just slops over everywhere. All you can do, if you want, is blot it out with rev-juice and noise and keeping busy."

Jack and Margaret exchanged glances. Martha raised one hand straight up between her parents' faces. "You see?" she said. "You know what you were doing just then?"

"We looked at each other, that's all," Margaret said.

"You were loving each other. You were speaking it without making a sound. That's how we learned, to begin with. From you, from watching you, from feeling you love. That's why we never needed a machine, because we had you to learn from."

"My darlings, we never meant to teach you such a thing," Margaret said. "Never. It's so dangerous. And now, someone knows."

Jack showed them the message: DECENT PEOPLE HATE YOU.

"Glad I'm not linked to them, they need civilizing," Eddie said.

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"Is that what you call it," Margaret remarked, feeling hysterical with fear and, at the same time, terribly relieved, though she didn't know why. Relieved of what, she asked herself.

"Sure," her daughter said. "That's what civilizing is, learning to control, so you can go out and meet everyone and let go without hurting. If you don't like someone, you just leave him alone and go on to someone else. We can do it together, the going out, or alone if we prefer. In fact, alone is very good sometimes."

"We must think what to do," Margaret said.

"We're in danger," Jack said. "Where can we go? Do you children know if it was the Bedfords?"

"Yes, them," Martha said rather diffidently. "We thought maybe we ought to do something to help them, but they didn't want it, you know. So we didn't know if it would be right to try."

"Do you mean you really could help them, and didn't? At the risk of being clinkered on their say-so?" Jack asked.

Eddie said, "We were afraid it might be an intrusion, and we know we don't have that right."

In panic and despair Jack said, "But to save our lives?"

"Of course it would have been right," Margaret said.

Eddie blinked at her. His smile was sad. "Well, you know, we understand that's what makes trouble. The assumption that it's okay to interfere, or to change people, or even to damage them, to save your own neck."

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"It's a question of ethics," Martha stated.

How well they have learned from us, Margaret thought bitterly. How very well we have taught them.

The police came into the crowded little room, with its rumpled beds and dimly glowing night light, and the Bedfords stood just outside in the hall to see them get theirs.

"Okay, now, where's the machine?" the police asked.

The other police began to open cabinets, pullout drawers, examine food units and flushing. Nothing illegal appeared.

"We got a report," the first police said.

"Filthy controllers," the Bedfords yelled from the hallway. "We looked in and could see your kids doing it in your living room. You got to keep track of your kids instead of messing around with other people."

As Eddie had said, it was natural as breathing. When the police seemed to be closing in, Margaret and Jack looked at each other. Eddie and Martha mind-linked, looping in their parents who joined gladly, and like water, their love was in danger of slopping over, running every which way, and touching everyone. So the police clinkered them before they could become dangerously free. It scorched holes in the floor. The Bedfords eyed the wisps of smoke hanging in the air, sincere reminders of dubious people, and went next-door to get some sleep with the music turned up.

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Jeanne Parker has published one novel and several short stories and says that she "was born on the Blackfeet reservation of Montana where at a tender age I broke horses and wrestled wild steers to the ground. Then, at a more advanced age, I became a certified anthropologist, took a degree in Slavic studies and went to live on the Soviet-Finnish border where I discovered the joys of the sauna and good vodka."

Sweets to the Sweet

by JEANNE PARKER

The agency gave Tess the papers to move the old man out. Her boss, who was inclined towards the bleeding-heart school of social work, suggested that Tess check around first. "If he looks like he can take care of himself, leave him alone. It's hard to start a new life at ninety-three. On the other hand, there is the sanitation angle. If the place is a mess, and if he seems senile, move him straight into the Home."

Tess did not need these suggestions. If she was sometimes accused of being hard, it was only that she was misunderstood. She knew she was not hard; really, she was much too soft. All her life she had been pushed around. Now it was her turn. "In such hard times," she told all her friends, "when everyone is slap-dash and over worked," the agency was damned lucky to get her. Tess cared.

There was never a question in her own mind about the right thing to do. Even before she reached the old man's address in the ramshackle flats on Railroad Street, her mind was busy, busy, busy creating scenes and dialogue to give her friends that evening over honey buns and tea. "The saddest old man...old Charley Witherspoon... living in filth and deep desolation... nor chick nor child to care for...." Her friends, she knew, would fall for that. They loved sad stories.

As she rolled her bright yellow Fiat into the alley, she could almost hear their appreciative murmuring as they demanded to know how a little sugar dumpling such as herself could find the stomach for such a bitter occupation. Their sympathy was countered by her careworn little smile, and their praise would pour upon her like a sweet and sticky syrup. Tess could hardly wait to get on with it.

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It was a hot morning, even for June, when she parked the Fiat and extricated herself, taking care not to split her tight skirt which was orange — the exact shade of nasturtium. It was then that she had her first vague apprehension that something strange was about to reach out and grab her. "Nevertheless, I soldiered on," she added, and pinned a single sprig of white lilac to her blouse.

It was not that she was vain, that she wore the flowers; it was that she liked to maintain a certain image, not so much an angel of mercy, but rather some brilliant blossom blooming in the drab and ugly lives of those she served. She saw herself as an exotic hothouse flower and dressed the part fanatically.

The papers. The papers. Mustn't forget the papers. Can't do a thing without the papers. She folded them once and started up the walk. From somewhere in the flats came a low, insistent humming which immediately put her in mind of country things like the crisscross patterns of bees, or butterflies on rolling fields of hay, or gorgeous animals deep in rut, and over all the wispiest strains from Beethoven's "Pastoral" symphony.

"My God! was it hot. You could fry eggs on the asphalt. And I had the creepiest feeling that these enormous eyes were watching me. It was exciting though. I had the power to move that old man, willy-nilly, into a more harmonious environment."

It was not hot inside. Like most old tenements, it was dark, dank, and deserted. It was so cold that trickles of moisture clung to the bricks like ice. "Poor old Charley. Up there all alone. And you can't imagine the stench." What she thought about stench was true. Tess had doused herself good with Wild Begonia, but, even so, the odors broke through and assaulted her nostrils with cigarettes and beer. Scorched eggs. Urine. The sweet-pea odor of sex.

"He *would* be on the top floor." At the first rickety landing she had to stop to catch her breath. Old Charley couldn't possibly hear her yet, but she just couldn't help herself from singing out, "Company coming! Get your best bib and tucker on!"

There was no answer. The halls were empty. The doors to vacant rooms hung open like the mouths of the hopeless insane. Three dead petunias, in three green plastic pots, barred her way.

Was this a sign?

"Shoo!" She shoved them with her foot, sent them rolling clackety-bump, clackety-bump down the stairs. Again the faint and steady buzzing like a faulty

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wire or a cheap cooler gone bad. "You never know what you'll find when you set your sights on helping people."

"Time to get crackin', Charley! Moving day today!" She felt a thrill like glory at her own voice commanding in the corridors. Charley wasn't going to like this. None of them wanted to go to the Home.

There was something gritty on the stairs. It was something more than dirt, for it rolled slightly under the soles of her shoes in a way that broken glass and mouse manure did not. It made her spine cringe to feel it. "But the homes of the poor are always like that," she could tell them tonight, and she knew they'd understand.

In her youth Tess had expected poverty to be far more rewarding. She had yearned for red-checked tablecloths and candles for lights. Where were the cousins in hand-me-downs to laugh at her jokes, and where was that special closeness that came from passing the jug and huddling together for warmth?

All she found was people. Obstinate people. Stupid people. Old people. Dirt. "How do you manage the patience to put up with the old folks?" she was asked in the cute little boutiques she frequented on Saturdays. Tess always shrugged off this question. How could she explain that she bore patience in her teeth like a rose? Old people were a challenge like artist's clay: they were malleable. She could mold them, bend them, shape them to her will. But who would understand that? "Old folks are sweetie-pies," she'd answer and leave it at that.

The humming stopped abruptly when she came to Charley's door. Tess was excited. "Open up! Charley!" Her voice was as bright as swords. "Open up! Here I come! Ready or not!" she shouted gaily and threw open the door.

Charley was not ready. She had caught him with his teeth out. He sat deep in the overstuffed sofa staring at her from round, frightened eyes. One hand was on his cane; the other reached across the table towards the tooth cup. His face was as flat as an old leaf or a paper cutout of a face. He strained to speak, but Tess interrupted. "Never mind, old-timer. I've come to take you to the Home."

His head tilted towards her on its long neck. "Naked as a buzzard's neck," was the way she'd describe it. "Thank God he had his trousers on, the poor old soul... braces over his underwear. What a pitiful sight to be seen."

Charley did not faint when she told him the news. But then he didn't smile either. To be fair, she explained it all again. "...so you

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see," she finished brightly, "you've got to get your socks on. It's straight to the Home with you!"

Charley was silent. He stared at his hands a while and then went to work clearing the spit from his throat. Tess had oodles of time. So she placed herself comfortably on the straight-back chair in the kitchen where the light from the window would catch in her honey-colored hair. She wanted to look nice while she waited.

There was grit on the seat of the chair. More of it lay scattered on the linoleum floor and over the kitchen table. It glittered like precious crystals in the small light from the window. Was it salt? Tess put out one tendril-like finger and touched the crystals to her tongue. It was sugar.

Charley made a strangled sound in his throat. "...I can't...go."

"Can't go? What do you mean you can't go? Of course you can go. Come now, find your shoes and socks." It did her good to be cheery. The old man talked like a pet crow.

"Don't...(cough, spit)...want... to go." Charley's face had no expression, but there was the start of a whimper in his voice that made Tess want to hurry him up.

"Nobody wants to go, Charley. But remember we've all got to go sometime. Today it's your turn."

He made no move to get up.

"Come on, now. No need to pack up or anything. They've got everything you'll ever need waiting for you at the Home." She stood over him in the threatening posture she'd learned from Body Language, but still he didn't budge.

"Can't...leave...Tiny."

"Tiny? Who's Tiny?"

"My...(cough, hack, spit)... pet."

"Charley, there's nothing on any of these papers about pets. Naturally you can't take a pet into the Home. Consider the problems. The Home's a real nice place, not like this. No cats, no dogs, no birds," she laughed. "Not so much as a fast-swimming guppy." She meant it as a joke, but he never cracked a smile.

"Don't you worry about your little pet. I'll take care of it for you." She laughed gaily to throw him off. "Just you show me where he is and I'll take care of you both in one trip. Two birds, so to speak."

The old man sank back, morose, into the sofa. Tess explored the room, looking for signs of Tiny. No filthy litter box, she was glad to see. No cage or fishbowl. Neither hide nor hair of a dog. Horses were out of the question.

The sink was clean. The faucets were polished. The dishrag hung sweet-smelling from a plastic ring near the stove. Cloth curtains in a

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calico print covered the cupboard shelves. When she drew the curtains back, the pots and pans behind were neatly stacked and shone with a clean dull glow. No denying the place was well cared for. Tess feared she might have to let him stay. She felt very, very tired when the humming began again.

"What...will you do...to Tiny?"

The question refreshed her. "Do to him?" She turned back from her inspection to find the old man's eyes boring into her. "Don't you worry. Tiny won't suffer much. Listen," she told him in a confidential manner, "there was a dear old thing down on River Road — you know where that is, don't you? Said she couldn't live without an old yellow tom. She had to go to the Home, too. Just like you, Charley. We took that old yellow tom to the city pound, and they were able to gas him that very afternoon. He never suffered more than a few minutes."

"You...can't do that...(wheeze, spit)...to Tiny."

"I'd like to know why not." Tess was indignant.

"I...love...him."

Now that was really too much! "Love!" she exclaimed. "What has love got to do with anything?"

"You...can't..."

"What do you mean, *can't?* We can do anything. After all, I have got papers." So what if his room was neat. There was the sugar. The sugar was her ace in the hole. Only a lunatic would have sugar scattered everywhere. Sugar was a definite sanitation problem. Who knew what kinds of filthy insects it would draw?

"You...can't kill...Tiny. I love ...Tiny. We...all need someone."

Tess was getting mad. This was not the time or the place to speak of love. She knew all about love anyway. She'd tried it once, and all she'd got for her trouble was the house and the car and a short trip to Reno. "You get that Tiny this very minute."

Charley turned his face, but Tess saw tears on the old man's face. The droning noise began again, much closer this time. She did not know why it gave her such an uneasy feeling. She could not wait to get out into the sun again. "Come on, come on," she snapped at Charley. "You can move faster than that."

Old Charley needed to talk. The sound was painful to Tess's ears, all his spitting, and hacking and wheezing. "When these old guys get going," she'd often remarked, "they're like cassette players with no *off* switch. They'll run on and on till they're finished." Old Charley's voice was getting stronger, too.

"Wife and I moved in here in '29. That's...when we found...Tiny. Was the wife...that found...him."

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"That's impossible. He'd be over 45 years old."

Charley didn't seem to hear her. "Big black eyes...looking at us. Such a cute little thing, no bigger...than a...catkin. Course he's growed some since." Charley was crying openly now.

Tess couldn't stand it. "I don't have to put up with any more of this childish behavior." She grabbed the old man's arm and shook it angrily. "Where is this awful creature? Where is Tiny?" She shouted in the old man's face. — "If you can't reason with them, the only thing left is force."

The old man cowered, then raised his cane and pointed towards a door. Tess hadn't noticed it before; it looked like a closet or maybe part of the wall.

"Don't hurt...Tiny. Please..."

She jerked the door open, still full of anger. In the dim light she thought at first the room was a closet full of suits. Black suits. Yellow suits. Fuzzy suits. Alternating black and yellow fuzzy suits. Then the suits began to hum.

"Charley!" Her voice pitched to a scream as the black and yellow mass came out of the room and towered above her. It was humming like a dynamo. Tiny's long black tongue unrolled and reached for the single sprig of lilac on her blouse. She backed away screaming, but Tiny's front mandibles snapped around her waist and his tongue sucked at the sugar on her hand, and the back of her skirt, and the toes of her shoes.

"Stop him! Charley!"

Charley tapped the floor three times with his cane just before the stinger found her round nasturtium-colored bottom and strains of Beethoven's "Pastoral" flooded her brain.

"Sweets...sweets to the sweet," was the last she heard from Charley.

It did not take her long to die.

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MIDWINTER MISHMOSH

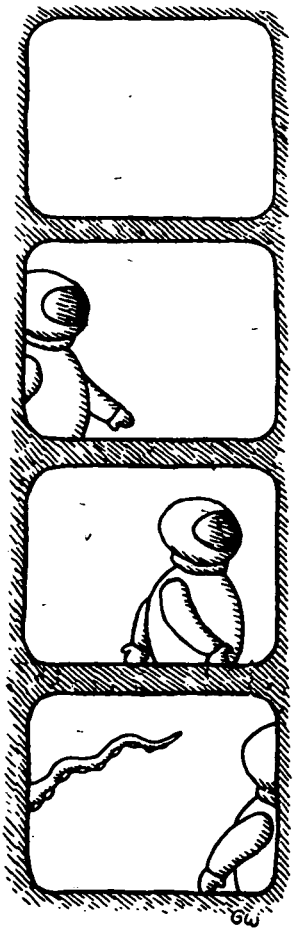
Another dead spot in the viewing calendar; not a new film for a month that seems likely fodder for this column, and on the tube the cancellations are being announced daily, but the replacements aren't on yet (the only hope for which I have anyhow is that they couldn't be *worse* than what we got at the beginning of the season). This may be, however, the calm before the storm — I'll touch on that a little later.

So this will have to be a bits and pieces piece. And to begin with, I must in all fairness add a few more words about *Space 1999*. After spending two months shooting it down (which, come to think of it, is what Alpha needs; so far, though, nobody has said "Get yer moon outta my sky or I'll git the shotgun"), it would be ungentlemanly of me not to note that the past month of episodes came up with two that were not bad; that were, in fact, almost of average *Star Trek* quality.

One of the two had the advantage of guest-starring the inimitable Christopher Lee as an alien refugee who, with a group of fellows, had set out from another system for Earth's moon, from which they hoped to contact

BAIRD SEARLES

Films



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humanity in hopes of refuge. Their idiot computer indeed brought them to Earth's moon, not taking into account the fact that it had gone bye-bye and was now wandering around the Galaxy's boondocks. There is, in the meantime, a domestic crisis on Alpha, where the representative from Earth who we met in the opening sequence keeps having tantrums because they're not devoting enough time to trying to get home.

Lee & Co. figure that they can make it to Earth in, oh, another 200 years or so; the troublemaker blackmails everybody into letting him go with them, but the aliens get their own back by slipping him a 200-minute Mickey rather than a 200-year cryogenic treatment. Fade out as his voice from the alien ship, still in radio range, is getting weaker.

It was neatly and cooly done, and Mr. Lee's presence, along with a good job of make-up and costuming for the aliens, made it worth it.

The other good episode raised an interesting moral question. Do the civilized elite survivors of a disabled 20-mile long ship have the right to live off of (literally) the mutated uncivilized descendants of their shipmates for 200 years? The question was fudged a little by making the crowd-from-the-other-side-of-the-tracks just nice guys that were a little dirty, but it was an workable premise.

These two not uninteresting episodes were balanced, I should point out, by some others of the metaphysical mush variety, including one where they fell into a black sun and had a nice chat with God. Nevertheless, I'll keep watching. (I must admit to a growing fondness for Barbara Bain. There is something momumental about her tireless unchangeability of expression.)

Literary dept .... A lot of s/f picture books came out around Christmas, hard and soft cover coffee table types. The only one to make much use of genre movie stills was *The Science Fiction Book* by Franz Rottensteiner (Seabury Press). The opinionated text (Lem is the greatest contemporary writer in the field, Sturgeon writes "soap opera," etc.) may have you throwing it across the room periodically, which will be a shame since it is beautifully produced and laid out, using aforesaid stills, pulp illustrations, and other visual goodies.

More to the immediate point is Ed Naha's *horrors: From Screen to Scream* (Avon), a Life-size paperback "encyclopedic guide" to fantasy films which presents alphabetically most, but not all, the genre films that are likely to show

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up on TV, as well as biographical bits on prominent pertinent personalities. The Searles test for books of this sort is to check out the inclusion and opinion on my three favorite obscure horror films — *Carnival of Souls, The Blood on Satan's Claw,* and *Night of the Living Dead* — and Naha scores an 80+ out of 100 for including all three and liking two of them. (Maybe he doesn't like *Living Dead* because it got too popular).

Anyhow, though the commentary is sometimes overopinionated and heavyhandidly sophomoric in attempts at humor, it's a handy bedside book to sort out the various Frankenstein and Godzilla movies.

Late-late-show-dept .... Speaking of *Carnival of Souls*, saw it again recently; every time I do, I'm more impressed by the directorial intelligence (Herk Harvey's, to be exact) that accomplished so much atmosphere on such a miniscule budget. And I'll keep mentioning it every year or so until it achieves the status it deserves.

Things-to-come-dept .... Or run for the hills, the dam is about to bust! All indications are that s/f is the next big thing in movies. *Damnnation Alley, Dune, The Man Who Fell to Earth, Star Wars, Logan's Run* and two — count 'em — two *King Kongs* (I'm sorry; the Trade Towers can never replace the Empire State Building) are a mere few of those in various stages of production or disruption. Looks like there won't be too many more dead spots in the viewing calendar. I've received some peevish letters lately from readers who must rival Pollyanna for optimism that accuse me of being over cynical and negative before the fact about upcoming films. My only reply is to suggest looking back over the film industry's batting average for good s/f films; about one every five years, isn't it?

Maybe this will be the year of the jackpot (with apologies to RAH).

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Shape-changing Lt. Ben Jolson of the Chameleon Corps returns to deal with planet-wide famine, willowy blondes among other things. Ron Goulart's latest book in the sf field is The Hellhound Project *(Doubleday).*

At the Starvation Ball

by RON GOULART

1

The catman fiddled with his tie and said, "Ten thousand dead of starvation in Lagosta Territory. That story in a moment, but first this message."

His image faded from the stage of the desktop tri-op TV viewer and was replaced by a platoon of marching meatballs. "Had a Mouthful lately?" they sang.

Captain Bridge reached out and flicked a switch on the TV.

The volume grew louder. "Yes, we mean a Big Mouthful!"

With his next flick the fat Chameleon Corps captain got the thing turned off. "Heartbreaking," he said. "It's really heartbreaking, isn't it?"

"Which?" said Lt. Ben Jolson. He was a tall lanky man in his late thirties, standing near one of the oval office's tinted oval windows.

"The people dying of hunger, I meant, not the commercial," said Bridge. "I seem to be having trouble getting my meanings across lately. It's funny, since back in college I majored in Conversation."

"I majored in shape-changing," said Jolson, who'd spent several long years being processed at the Chameleon Corps Academy back home on the planet Barnum. "Which brings me to the question of ..."

Captain Bridge thrust an earplug into his ear. The plug was connected by a cord to one of the little olive-colored spheres scattered over his lucite desktop. "Um hum ... um hum ..." he muttered as he listened to the infosphere. Jerking the plug out, he said, "The situation is growing desperate."

"You had to stick that thing in your ear to find that out?"

"I'm giving you a sum-up, Jolson, of the CC field reports on starvation on this planet of

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Malagra." He lifted up, in turn, several of the other spheres. "I also have the Starvation Study Force report, funded by the Ferrmily Family Fund, and the —"

"One on the end is a walnut."

"Eh?"

Jolson pointed a lean finger. "Walnut, that one."

"Oh, so it is. That's why it has a little face painted on it." Bridge dropped the nut into his vest pocket. "My youngest made it in his shop therapy course."

"Does my assignment have something to do with the increasing lack of food here on Malagra?" Jolson glanced out at the afternoon city. It had started to snow, huge mud-brown flakes were tumbling down. "That why I was hauled out from Barnum?"

"Hum ... this one seems to be a walnut, too." Capt. Bridge shook it beside his ear. "A walnut shouldn't have metallic parts rattling inside, should it?"

"Nope. That must be a bugging device."

"Think so?" Rattling it once again, the fat captain stood and trotted to a wall slot marked SECURITY DEPT. He dropped the suspicious nut down the chute. "Let SD worry about it."

"Who'd be interested in tapping you?"

"You're new on Malagra." Bridge settled into his lucite swivel chair again. "Besides being the pesthole of the universe, it's a hotbed of intrigue."

"Ah, one of those." Jolson looked out the egg-shaped window. The sun was shining now.

"Did you hear a muffled explosion just now?"

"No."

"Must be my imagination. I always fret when I drop something down the SD tube. We had quite a mailbomb scare last year. One of the lizard-men guerrilla groups had perfected an exploding girlie magazine which they ... but let's get back to the point." He held up a copy of a vinyl magazine called *Decency*. "Read this issue yet, Jolson? There's a piece in here by Melody McQuestion entitled *Aspects of Starvation on Malagra.*"

"My subscription's lapsed."

"It's a heartbreaking article," said Bridge. "You see, because of various agricultural disasters during the past few years ... you may not have been here long enough to notice that Malagra enjoys rather unstable weather."

A smutty wind was blowing at an impressive rate outside now, carrying dry leaves, shreds of vinyl magazine pages, several straw derbies and a polka dot parasol by the high-up office.

"I've noticed." Jolson crossed the room, sat wrong-way-round in a neoprene chair.

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"It's all resulted in a terrible food shortage in most of the territories, although so far here in Lavandaria Territory we've been, knock wood, very fortunate." Bridge couldn't find anything wooden and lowered his fist to his lap. "Since our native planet of Barnum is responsible for all the planets in the Barnum System, we're obliged to see to it that vast numbers of Malagrans do not perish from want of food."

"Peanut oil," said Jolson.

"Eh? Is that some new youth slang rejoinder?"

"Peanut oil is the major export of Malagra to Barnum," said Jolson. "And so far the peanut crop hasn't been hurt much. But if too many people die here, it'll effect shipments because —"

"Yes, that's also a consideration. But let me assure you that Barnum's chief concern is a humanitarian one and .... What's that? Hail?"

Something was rattling at the windows. "Meteor shower."

Sighing, Capt. Bridge said, "Sometimes I admire you, Jolson, being semiretired with your own little ceramics business back on Barnum. When I was stationed on Murdstone, I used to think it was a pesthole, but then I came to Malagra ... now then. Have you heard of FooD? That's big F, little o, little o, big D."

Jolson said, "Yeah, that was going to be the end result of something known as the Hoogenboom Process."

"Exactly. Dr. Hoogenboom, one of Malagra's most brilliant scientists, had perfected a system which converts ... well, what shall I call it? Hum ... sewage. Yes, sewage. The Hoogenboom Process converts sewage into a highly nutritious food. Further this FooD can be made to resemble meat, vegetables, fruit or even rocky road fudge."

"You said perfected. I thought —"

"No, he perfected it before ... we're fast approaching the nub of your assignment, Jolson. I want ... oops! Sorry, thunder and lightning always startles me. Hum ... we have information indicating Dr. Hoogenboom, shortly before he vanished from the face of Malagra, had indeed succeeded in perfecting his Hoogenboom Process. The source of some of our information is a man named Charles E. Huff."

"Who is ...?"

"Until recently Huff was Hoogenboom's right-hand assistant. In fact, he's the one who thought of making FooD into rocky road fudge," explained the captain. "Our problem is that Huff seems to have done something to anger the local government here in Lavandaria Territory. The government is,

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as you may know, a benevolent despotism."

"What did they do to Huff?"

"He's at the moment a resident of a nursing home complex calling itself Declining Years Rancho."

"He's an old guy?"

"He was, when he apparently ran afoul of the system, a few days from his thirty-fourth birthday," replied Bridge. "Now, we hear, he appears to be a doddering wreck of ninety-one."

"How'd they do that?"

"We don't know for sure ... but on this assignment, Jolson, I want you to worry only about the Hoogenboom Process," said Capt. Bridge. "Barnum's new food aid program for Malagra, which is certain to pass both houses of Parliament back home, should do a good deal to avert a planet-wide famine. If we had Hoogenboom's secret, though, we could feed everybody. And cheaper."

Scratching a lean cheek, Jolson asked, "You want me to turn into an old guy and go inside the Rancho?"

"Yes, exactly."

Jolson possessed the ability to change his shape and appearance at will. "You don't want Huff rescued?"

"Not yet," said Bridge, nodding. "Barnum's relationship with the government of Lavandaria Territory is a little uneasy right now. We can't, therefore, afford to do anything so overt as grabbing Huff away from them. We're fairly certain Huff knows something about what's become of Dr. Hoogenboom. Furthermore, we're hoping he can tell us how to get our hands on a copy of the process formula. With the formula in our possession Barnum can force production of FooD and avert further suffering and heartbreak."

"Is there some specific old man you want me to impersonate?"

"There is. I have all the data here." He plucked up another sphere.

2

Jolson looked across the bright desert and saw nothing.

It started to snow.

"Allow me to put your mittens on," offered the willowy blonde nurse who'd met him at the nearby airbus depot.

"The snow drifts down like puffs of fluff," recited Jolson, who was now stooped, gnarled and white-haired. "My heart responds with ... something something."

The lovely girl suddenly gave him a nudge in the ribs with her pert elbow. "I wouldn't try too much of that guff, even if you are supposed to be John Scott Gurly."

Cupping a hand to his ear, Jolson said, "Hey? What's that you're saying, Miss?"

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"You've got the old coot part down fine, but your poetry is ... oops."

The ground was opening up a few feet in front of them.

"Earthquake?" inquired Jolson.

Music, soothing string music, came billowing up out of the ground. A smiling android in a white suit came marching up the steps which showed through the widening opening. "Welcome to Declining Years Rancho, Mr. Gurly. It isn't every day we have the former poet laureate of Malagra come down to stay with us. I'm Young Dr. Feldman."

"Down?" said Jolson in his shaky old Gurly voice.

"Declining Years Rancho is entirely beneath the surface of the earth," explained the med-andy. "Thus assuring that younger residents of the area will not —"

"So my kith and kin got me underground sooner than I figured," muttered Jolson, allowing the blonde nurse to lead him down the stairs. "The grave's to be our final home ... And yet ... something something ... roam."

"Nix," whispered the nurse.

"Beautiful, beautiful," said Young Dr. Feldman. "But that's what one would expect from a former poet laureate."

The Rancho was all pale-blue corridors and ramps. As the lid closed on them, a hurricane was commencing to howl across the desert.

"Kachow!" said Nurse Bunshaft at 6 A.M. the next morning. The burly woman kicked a button on the leg of Jolson's bed, causing it to flip him upright into the center of his pale-blue room.

"Your hair's falling off," Jolson observed as he got, feebly, into his old-man clothes.

"Kachow!" said the husky nurse, slapping him across the back. "Let's have more dressing and less bullshit."

"A few more kachows, and it'll flop off your dome all together."

"I got more," Nurse Bunshaft assured him. "Kachow!" She headed him for the door with another whack across the shoulder blades.

Young Dr. Feldman met him out in the corridor. "Well, Mr. Gurly, did you enjoy your first night in Declining Years Rancho? Most people do."

"You had green eyes yesterday and now they're brown," said Jolson as he disentangled his beard from his tunic's decorative zipper.

"Very perceptive, but then one expects that of a former poet laureate," said the smiling android. "Actually, Mr. Gurly, one poor overworked Young Dr. Feldman couldn't possibly meet all the

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demands put upon him by hundreds of cranky, pesty snotty-nosed old people. So here at the Rancho we have seven Young Dr. Feldmans. Nothing to worry about, we are all familiar with each of our charges medical records. I might add, by the way, that you led a somewhat uproarious life until you turned to —"

"A person might expect to run into a Young Dr. Feldman most anywhere?" asked Jolson. "Even down in the Hopeless Ward?"

"Yes, nothing is too disgusting for a mechanical man."

"A doctor's path is strewn with thorns," recited Jolson, "yet he needs must ..: something something."

"Exactly," said Young Dr. Feldman. "Now allow me to escort you to the Breakfast Pavilion. This morning it's fakeggs, any style."

"Kachow," muttered Jolson.

An old woman in a grout-skin robe was thrashing an android at the end of the corridor. "Simulacra!" she yelled accusingly. "You're not my grandson Neddy!"

"Have a heart, gran. I'm a reasonable fac —"

"Ninny!"

Thwack!

"Say, doc," requested the android as Jolson went hurrying by, "could you tell this old girl to —"

"No time now," said Jolson in his Young Dr. Feldman voice. "Got an interesting emergency in the Hopeless Ward."

Thwack! Smack!

Jolson continued downward. For a man processed by the Chameleon Corps it was simple to achieve an exact resemblance to the handsome regular features of the Young Dr. Feldman androids. Coming up with a white suit and getting out of his locked-for-the-night room had been the difficult parts. Fortunately, the kit he wore strapped beneath his arm contained both sewing materials and a multi-lockpick. After fashioning a Young Dr. Feldman outfit from one of his sheets, Jolson had used the pick on the door.

During his briefing in the Lavandaria capital yesterday Jolson had been given the layout of the entire Rancho and the probable location of Charles E. Huff.

He rounded a bend, descended another ramp and encountered two human guards.

"Evening, doc," said the burlier of the two as they stepped aside.

"And a lovely evening it is, too," replied Jolson heartily. He continued on and found himself in the Hopeless Ward.

Down here the doors didn't show at all in the pale-blue walls; there was a chill silence all around.

Counting off paces, Jolson stopped in front of a stretch of

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seemingly blank wall. He glanced around before touching his lock-pick to the wall.

The wall slid open and Jolson crossed into the room which held Charles E. Huff.

Huff, a frail white-haired man who appeared to be in his nineties, was struggling with the chrome and lucite wheelchair which he was seated in. "Let me up, jerk," he told it in his squeaky voice.

The chair continued to hold him down with thin coil arms.

When the door had closed on them, Jolson said, "Huff?"

"How old would you say I am, doctor?"

"Listen, I'm from —"

"I'm thirty-four," continued Huff. "I don't look it, though. You don't need to be polite. I know I look seventy if I look a day."

"You look ninety, now shut up a minute." Jolson moved to the chair and stunned it with a tiny tool from his kit.

"This has been the most incredible thing," Huff went on. "I'm old before my time. My hair literally turned white overnight."

The wheelchair swooned, arms going limp.

"I'm with the Chameleon Corps. Now if you'll —"

"Glory be! You've come to rescue me." Huff clutched at Jolson's arm with gnarled fingers. "I think I'm still spry enough to fight my way out of —"

"I can't rescue you now," Jolson explained. "We'll spring you after we —"

"Not now? Say, do you know what it's like to be prematurely old and stuck in here with a bunch of old wrecks? And the meals ... fakeggs any style for breakfast, fakeggs sunny-side-up for —"

"Tell me about Dr. Hoogenboom and the process," urged Jolson.

"Huh?"

"What I want now is information. Then —"

"Nuts to you, friend." Huff tried to make an angry fist to shake at Jolson, but couldn't. "You get me out of this mess or I won't tell you diddly. I mean to say, there are —"

Slap!

Jolson had taken a truth disk out of his armpit. He attached it to Huff's scrawny neck. "You have to answer my questions now."

"Yes, sir," replied Huff in a dazed voice.

"Tell me about the process and what happened to Dr. Hoogenboom."

Huff was almost at the end of his account when the wall whisked open and Nurse Bunshaft leaped into the cell.

"Kachow!" the burly nurse said, swinging at Jolson.

"Your wig just fell off." Jolson

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ducked the blow, got a jab into the nurse's ribs.

"Okay, wiseass, you've tumbled to me. I'm not Nurse Bunshaft. I'm not even a lady." He took another poke at Jolson. "Actually I'm a master of disguise, much like yourself."

"I never wore a wig in my life." Jolson gave him two punches to the chin.

The husky man growled, throwing himself at Jolson. "That did it. Now I'm really mad." His thick fingers closed on Jolson's throat.

Once more the wall opened. "That'll be enough of that."

"Kachow! Kachow!" roared the imitation nurse as he bonged Jolson's skull against the hard floor.

"Darn it, don't make me use my stungun."

As his head was bounced up and down, Jolson noticed the familiar long trim legs of the willowy blonde who'd escorted him to the Rancho yesterday.

"Okay, you asked for it!"

Thwang!

"Ka —" The pseudo Bunshaft froze.

Jolson pried the fingers off his throat, rolled out from under the stunned man and got to his feet. "Thanks, nurse," he croaked.

"Oh, I'm not a nurse."

"You're not a nurse, he's not a nurse, I'm not a doctor. No wonder the —"

"We can chitchat later, Lt. Jolson. Right now we'll have to hustle. It won't do to get caught here."

Jolson nodded, retreived his truth disk and turned Huff's chair back on.

"Yes, of course," the blonde said.

"Nurse," said Huff, blinking awake, "how old would you guess I am?"

3

"There it is down there," said the willowy blonde.

Her aircruiser was flying low through the night. Rain smacked hard at the windows.

"That's the territorial sewage plant?" Below, brightly lit, stretched a series of castles and villas.

"It's called Sewage Estates," replied the girl as she punched out a landing pattern. "There are rumors of misuse of funds by some of the Sewage Authority people. As a matter of fact, I'm going to do a piece on it as soon ... oh."

"What?"

"Your face. It just changed. Did you know that?"

"Yeah. I don't need the Young Dr. Feldman face anymore."

"Is this ... you?"

"It is."

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Melody McQuestion, for such it was, narrowed her left eye and pursed her lips. "You're not at all unattractive, Lieutenant."

She had introduced herself to him while they were jogging across the desert to the girl reporter's concealed cruiser. She was in this part of Malagra to do a piece on the vanishing Dr. Hoogenboom. Independent research, according to Melody, had led her to the Declining Years Rancho at the same time as Jolson. When he asked her how she knew who he was, the willowy blonde reporter refused to divulge her sources. She'd apparently been concealed in an adjoining room while Jolson questioned Huff. The advent of the spurious Nurse Bunshaft had prompted her to break in and rescue Jolson.

"You've got no idea," asked Jolson now, "who that guy in the wig was?"

"Oh, I have some ideas, Ben ... you don't mind if I call you Ben?"

"Not at all, Melody. Who is he?"

"I'll let you know when I'm certain." The cruiser dropped down toward the pink-lit Sewage Estates landing lot. "At the moment, let's concentrate on Calvin Surface."

According to Huff, Surface was the person Dr. Hoogenboom had gone to visit the day he vanished. His appointment had been for 2 P.M. No one had seen Hoogenboom since. The problem now was —

"You're much more amiable than most Chameleon Corps agents, Ben," Melody was saying. "Agreeing to let me tag along like this on what I'm sure you consider *your* mission. The Political Espionage Office is even worse than CC when it comes to co-operation. Once on Esmeralda I wanted to get a look at a PEO assassination and —"

Wap!

Jolson had extracted a tiny control bug from his kit. He slapped it against the girl's throat. "Okay, Melody," he instructed, "you'll drop me here at Sewage Estates and then fly over to the capital and spend the night at your hotel. Tomorrow morning, and not before, you can remove that control gadget."

"Yes, sir, I'll do exactly what you say."

"Yeah, I know."

The ship touched down. Hailstones began to fall down through the night.

4

"Yes, master," said the middle-aged lizard man in a droning voice.

Jolson said, You don't have to call me that, Surface."

"As you wish, sire." The manager of the sewage-processing

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factory made a bow which caused his scaly green head to scrape the silver-legged coffee table behind which he was seated. "Your merest wish is my stern command, m'lord."

Jolson frowned. He'd slipped into the manager's mansion, after stunning two guards, a butler and a downstairs maid. About five mintues after that, he'd been able to slap a control bug against Calvin Surface's tough green neck. "You don't need to be so damn subservient," Jolson told him now. "Just answer my questions."

"To hear is to obey, your celestial majesty. I am but your groveling slave who —"

"Okay, all right. Tell me about Dr. Hoogenboom." The Chameleon Corps agent straddled a gold-legged chair. "Was he here?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, illuminated master of my fate and captain of my —"

"Why did he come to see you?"

"He was angry with me, sahib."

"Angry. Why?"

"He had, learned, oh divine leader of destinies, that I'd rerouted some of the sewage."

"Rerouted it?"

"Aye, sweet prince." Surface's bowing head bonged the table, causing a gold-plated electric nutpick to dance. "I had promised that 1000 gallons a day would start flowing into Dr. Hoogenboom's FooD Research Center. Alas, my charismatic master, I went back on my promise."

"Why?"

"The Lt. Meatball people made me a better offer."

"Who's Lt. Meatball?"

"Have you never heard of the Big Mouthful, bwana? The Lt. Meatball chain of drivin-flyin restaurants is the largest and most prosperous on Malagra."

Jolson stood up, scowling. "What are they doing with 1000 gallons of sewage a day?"

"One can but guess, your lordship."

"You pipe the stuff from here to them. Where exactly does it end up?"

"The destination of the sewage is the main Lt. Meatball plant on the outskirts of the capital, marse."

"Did Hoogenboom know where the stuff was going?"

"Alas, yes. I made the error of letting that fact slip," said the controlled lizard man. "He left here, quite angry, to beard the Lt. Meatball people in their lair."

"Who'd you make your Lt. Meatball deal with?"

"Their public relations director, oh master mine. A likable chap named Goethe Luzz."

"I'll go see him," said Jolson.

The extremely beautiful red-haired girl in the illustrated lycra

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dress came smiling toward Jolson. "Mr. Bogg, we're all ... so excited!" She caught hold of both his plump hands in hers. "Little did we dream that Jerome K. Bogg, the Junk Gourmet himself, was on Malagra. It's all so very ... exciting!"

"Too skinny in the pins," remarked the knee-high copper-colored box at Jolson's side.

"That's because of your point of view," Jolson said. He had changed himself, this morning, into an exact replica of the fat fifty-five year old Bogg and come calling at the main offices of Lt. Meatball. "My publicity tour on my new book, *Terrific Takeouts* written & eaten by the Junk Gourmet, was extended at the last moment to include your planet, Miss ...?"

The lovely redhead smiled. "Tarp, Mary Alice Tarp."

"Not too much in the chest either," observed the copper-colored box.

"And this must be ...?" said Miss Tarp.

"Yes, this is HotShot, my mobile computer-stove," said Jolson. "Not only me stove, I might add, but a very dear friend."

"How'd you like a scone?" asked HotShot of the girl, starting to open his oven.

Jolson booted the stove. "Not just yet. Now, then, Miss Tarp, I am terribly anxious to begin my tour of your facility here."

"I can well imagine," said the lovely girl. "If you'll come this way, I'll see if Mr. Luzz is ready to —"

"How come you got hamburgers on your keaster?" the pet stove asked her.

Miss Tarp patted the illustration on her backside. "Actually, HotShot, I have lifelike full-color pictures of all 27 of the Lt. Meatball burgers and sandwiches all over the dress," she replied. "I'm wearing one of our menu dresses. All the girls who —"

"Only $2.98 for the Big Mouthful without pseudospuds," said the stove. "That's pretty reasonable."

Miss Tarp rubbed at her left buttock. "Oops, that's a misprint. It should be $3.98. No one's noticed before, thank you."

"Lot of guys don't like such narrow keasters, which is probably why —"

"We mustn't keep you any longer, Miss Tarp," said Jolson in his Bogg voice. "I know you must be busy here in the very hub of things."

HotShot asked, "What's that there to the left of your navel?"

"Um ... oh, that's the Lt. Meatball MomNPop Special. A doubledecker edible plastic sandwich with two strips of styro cheese and nearlettuce garnish. $4.50."

"Is that a donut over your left —"

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"Forward," suggested Jolson as he delivered another kick to the stove.

"Just follow me down this way."

"$2.25 for a side order of plastifries?" said HotShot as they trailed the girl along a cheese-colored corridor.

Goethe Luzz was a beaming catman of forty-two. He was huffing and puffing now, trying to inflate a balloon. "We'll let it pass." The balloon dropped to his desktop. "As you say, you aren't that anxious to have a Lt. Meatball balloon."

"I do appreciate the thought, though."

Luzz fluffed his whiskers with a furry paw. "I have one thing I'd like to show you before we take the tour." He reached his hand out of sight into a drawer. "Very well, Lt. Jolson, up with your hands!"

"Anticipated again." Jolson raised his chubby Bogg hands above his head.

"I'm no fake," HotShot put in. "I'm a legit stove, an innocent bystander really to this whole sorry busi —"

"Enough," said Luzz. He came around his bun-shaped desk and took both Jolson's concealed pistol and his kit. "I'm anxious to browse through your kit. You're the first Chameleon Corps agent I've —"

"Since you know who I am, Luzz, you must know I'm backed by the Barnum government and by the Political Espionage Office."

"Oh, I know who you are right enough. I'm going to pretend, however, that I believe you really are Bogg, the Junk Gourmet. After the accident I'll simp —"

"Accident?"

"You're going to stumble and fall into a vat of fries," explained the public relations man.

"The perfect end for the Junk Gourmet," said HotShot.

Luzz chuckled. "You have a very droll stove, Lieutenant." He prodded Jolson in the ribs with his blaster. "Out that door over there and then down Corridor 6; that'll be the mustard-colored one."

"PEO isn't going to ... oops!" Jolson apparently tripped over the stove when he turned to obey the catman's orders.

Yanking the oven open, Jolson pulled out the stungun he'd concealed there earlier and fired at Luzz.

The catman froze.

5

Reaching a furry hand into the breast pocket of his neosatin one-piece dinnersuit, Jolson drew forth his invitation to the Starvation Ball.

The android butler took it and scanned it. "Mr. Goethe Luzz," he said. "Did I pronounce that more

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or less correctly, sir?"

"You got the Luzz fine," said Jolson, who was a dead ringer for the catman PR director. "On the Goethe you went a little astray. It's pronounced Goethe."

"Goethe? Can you beat that." The butler dropped Jolson's invitation into a licorice-colored plastic bowl on a marble pedestal just inside the wide main entrance of the Ferrmily mansion. "I tell you, I'm having a little trouble with names tonight. They decided, at the last minute, to rewire me in order to provide what is known as a British accent. Do you know what that is?"

"Solar System, Earth. Very high class."

Jolson passed on into the vast foyer. Nine hundred of the wealthiest citizens of the territory were already here. Each couple had donated $2000 to the Ferrmily Starvation Study Force Fund. Preston Ferrmily's home consisted of several dozen semispherical floating rooms, each connected by a tube-enclosed passway, and was spread out over fifteen wooded acres. Around the foyer hung tri-op viewers, each showing a different famine area of the planet.

The Archbishop of Lavandaria, a plump cyborg, was staring up at the nearest screen. Tears of concern came flowing out of his eyes. When he brought up his real hand to wipe his eyes, he hit himself in the ear with the eclair he'd been nibbling. "Heartbreaking," he said to Jolson.

"So I hear." Jolson pushed on.

Three local princesses were up on one of the bandstands, stripping off their garments and auctioning them for the benefit of the starving.

A lizard man bid $5000 for a support sock.

Jolson climbed up a passway to a higher level. The band in here was composed of birdmen. They were playing Venusian Swing. The saxophone section leaped to their feet, all owl men, to take a chorus.

"May I have this dance, miss?" Jolson said to pretty Melody McQuestion.

The willowy blonde said, "Listen, I don't want you to think I'm a bigot. The thing is, I have an awful allergy to cat dander. So if you don't mind —"

"We'll sit this one out then, Melody." He took hold of her arm in his paw.

Her lovely eyes widened. "You aren't ... are you ... you're Jolson."

He led her into an alcove. "I've got an exclusive story for you."

"I'm still mad at you, or I ought to be. Turning me into a zombie and after I'd —"

"You told somebody about my talking to the guy at Sewage Estates."

"Yes, I reported to my editor ... what has that got to do with anything?"

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"Know who owns your magazine, *Decency?*"

"The Decency Publishing Chain. They also put out *Honesty, Integrity, Morality Digest,* and —"

"The Ferrmily family owns your magazine," he told her. "Everything you told your editor was passed on to Preston Ferrmily. Which explains how I got anticipated so much since I hit Malagra. Oh, yeah, and he also had the local Chameleon Corps offices bugged for a spell."

Melody touched a hand to her cheek. "I can't believe —"

"I got most of this from the PR man at Lt. Meatball, who'd been waiting for me since they knew Surface would send me there."

"The restaurant people?"

"Yep, Ferrmily owns Lt. Meatball, too."

A parrot man took a hot trumpet solo. The dancers stopped to applaud.

Jolson continued: "When Dr. Hoogenboom came to Ferrmily's Starvation Force with his FooD formula for converting sewage into food, Preston Ferrmily swiped the process. For the past eight days all the Lt. Meatball outlets have been serving FooD."

"Darn, and I had lunch at one today."

"Right now I'm going to find Preston Ferrmily and have a talk with him. He's got Dr. Hoogenboom locked away in one of his outspheres."

"Why are you confiding in me, Ben?"

"When I spotted you here I decided it'd be safest to tell you what I'm up to. And to insist you keep quiet and out of my way."

"I suppose in a way that's flattering, indicating you think I'm perceptive enough to penetrate your —"

"You're a jinx. Now stay right here and don't tell anybody anything."

"I'm not really allergic to dander, by the way. So if you'd like to dance be —"

Jolson was already crossing the dance floor.

6

"Does all this starvation stuff unsettle you?" the grey haired man asked the girl.

"Well, Pres, it makes me hungry?"

"I'll flick off the monitors." Preston Ferrmily rose up off the floating sofa to cross to the control panel for the tri-ops which floated around the domed study. "Some nice footage there ... sunset at the Paupers Relocation Camp.

"It's ... well, heartbreaking." The girl bent down to gather her all season undersuit up off the floor.

"Not putting your things on already, Dinah?"

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"Thinking of all those people starving makes me weepy," said Dinah, standing to better slip into her undersuit. "And I don't like to cry when I'm naked. I jiggle too much when I'm raked with sobs."

"There's no need to feel that bad," Ferrmily assured her. "Affairs like tonight's Starvation Ball are raising a substantial amount for the starving populace of our planet."

She left her undersuit pulled up as far as her hips and sighed. "It doesn't seem enough somehow, Pres. I mean, here we are surrounded with ..." She gestured at the various trays of food floating near the sofa. "... surrounded with soyduck sandwiches, seaweed pate, kelp melba ... I don't know what those things are ..."

"Ecological eclairs," said the millionaire.

"Ecological eclairs, synthetic shad roe, gluten pizzas ... Um. That looks good." She took a slice.

"You jiggle when you chew, too."

"I know, Pres, it's the curse of being plump," said Dinah unhappily.

A door whirred open to admit an android butler with a tray of hot cocoa. "Your hot cocoa, gov."

"I don't think we'll want any cocoa now, Rafael," said Ferrmily.

"Me name is Bert now, gov. Since they reprogrammed me with the British accent."

"Bert then. Go away for a while."

"Hot cocoa's no good when it's cold, gov." Jolson moved a few paces closer to the millionaire.

"I really must have you rewired again," said Ferrmily. "You're getting almost insolent."

"Blimey, gov," said Jolson. "You hain't seen nothing yet." Jolson took a control bug from his armpit kit.

Womp!

It clung to Ferrmily's throat.

Dinah said, "Oh, is this the revolt of the machines I've heard people talk about?"

"Not at all, miss." Jolson produced his blaster pistol and pointed it at her. "Put your clothes on and sit down."

"Put them *on*? You sure you don't mean take them *off*?"

"You've got me mixed up with a different sort of intruder," Jolson told her. "I'm here to rescue Dr. Hoogenboom and find out about FooD."

"Oh ... well, Pres knows a lot about that," she said.

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Two items follow: A short story by Barry Malzberg entitled "Seeking Assistance," and an essay that explains why it will probably be the last science fiction story he will ever write. We run the latter because it says much [see also Harlan Ellison's letter] about the great opportunities and the great limitations of this field for a writer, and we should all listen with interest, since there is no future for science fiction without a constant infusion of new and talented writers.

Rage, Pain, Alienation and Other Aspects of the Writing of Science Fiction

by BARRY N. MALZBERG

The End of Intelligent Writing: Literary Politics In America, By Richard Kostelanetz. Sheed & Ward, $12.95; New York, 1974; 434 pp. plus bibliography and index.

Kostelanetz's basic theory, articulated over several chapters and with an occasional awesome specificity, is that a small cabal of (mostly Jewish) intellectuals now in their fifties and sixties seized control of the major publishing/critical/review outlets shortly after World War II, exert something approaching complete control over those who would have a major career in American letters and *won't let anyone new in.* Most specifically, Kostelanetz (himself now thirty-six) claims that almost no American writer under forty has been able to achieve a wide audience for serious work much less critical acknowledgement; with the exceptions of Renata Adler, Joyce Carol Oates and Thomas Pynchon (two women and an enigma) the youngest American writers of high reputation are Phillip Roth and Susan Sontag, both over forty.

The cabal, Kostelanetz states, has erased almost all competing schools — the southern agrarian, the old New England Protestant — by taking over the careers of a few of its more noted members and ignoring or suppressing the work of others. The most devastating weapon available to this cabal — which stretches from the offices of Random House to those of the *Partisan Review* to the editorships of many of the mass magazines like

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Harper's to the offices of certain literary agents to the *New York Review of Books* and the *Sunday Times Book Review* — is not to attack but to ignore, and its hold upon the small, tempestuous world which controls access to the observable literary media is so complete that it can virtually create, suspend or deny reputations as effortlessly as it can convene a cocktail party ... at which most of the real business is contracted anyway.

The book was rather guiltily and prominently reviewed in most of the media which Kostelanetz attacks in a kind of unanimity of two-pronged response: 1) Mr. Kostelanetz is just jealous and envious of those who have succeeded; there is no cabal, just a bunch of nice, mutually helpful people some with common roots who are always looking for good new writers and good new work, just can't find enough of it but we're so fair-minded that we're reviewing this book right here, and 2) anyway, all those mostly unknown writers who Kostelanetz cites as being starved out of the markets aren't any good anyway, judging from the excerpts of their work he quotes. He just wants to promote his coterie which is less talented than those coteries which have made it, not that there are any coteries at all, of course. We're all just good friends here.

The book then disappeared into the basements of libraries (which is where I picked up my copy a year after publication) and to the remainder tables; it has never been paperbacked to my knowledge and has had no visible influence upon the course of the markets to say nothing of the people most concerned with it, those cited in *The End of Intelligent Writing* as being denied a future. The unknowns are still unknown, the unpublished still unpublished, the critically ignored and forgotten (Cecil Dawkins, Leon Rook) not yet selected for the Modern Library.

I came to this book late because of my almost automatic hostility toward what I took to be its central thesis (that the author's friends were being denied, but that if this situation were to reverse itself they would deny others; in short there was no objection to the system, merely its misapplication in the author's case) and my own suspicion that, since I am a commercial "pop" writer, Kostelanetz would regard me as being even a step further down the rung from the nexus and their excluded; as someone simply not worth mentioning or campaigning for at all. I was partially right but mostly wrong on both of these rather knee-jerk reactions, and I wish that I had come to this book a long

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time ago and I recommend it fervently to each and every one of you who buy this magazine for any reason other than to get through the next hour or so (not an objectionable reason at all; these are the readers who have kept science fiction alive) because it has a heart of darkness and a true message: we, meaning those who toil in the wilted vineyards of commercial fiction, may soon enough be the only ones left to perpetuate the form. If there are any left at all.

This is not quite what I wanted to say here however — nor did I want to spend much time investigating Kostelanetz, who seems to be essentially right although wrong-headed in many ways and in shocking ignorance of science fiction in particular. (For instance he says "Of the periodicals founded in the late sixties by paperback publishers, the best of the lot, Delany and Hacker's *Quark* died much too soon after auspiciously introducing not only several good young writers but a valid new development in s-f that combines modernist literary values with speculative intelligence," an incredible hash of misstatement since *Quark* was not the best of the original anthologies but very likely the worst, was in a part a coterie publication for friends of the editors and collapsed while leaving the market for original anthologies as viable as it ever has been. He also includes several s-f writers in his list of four hundred writers born after 1937 to "watch" but manages to ignore Norman Spinrad while putting in Lawrence Yep, put in Panshin while neglecting Effinger, put in Terry Champagne while ignoring Dozois. Not critical judgment; ignorance is operating here.) No, in truth and upon the occasion of the publication in the same magazine that published my story "Final War" eight years ago to the day and gave me my career of what will be my last science-fiction story ... actually I wanted to talk about myself.

Bet you never thought I'd get there.

"Seeking Assistance" will not be the last s-f story I will ever publish, I fear; several written earlier remain in the inventories of editors like Silverberg and Elwood. It is, however, in point of chronology the last I will ever write, and publishing it here in the magazine which has been central to my career, under the editorship of the man who, along with his late father Joseph Wolfe has been instrumental in keeping me psychically above ground seems the proper thing to do. I would have it no other way.

Reading *The End of Intelligent Writing* took me back ten years in

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time. It took me back past my decision in January of 1975 to cease writing science fiction; it took me past 1973 when I won the Campbell Award and was able for a brief period to sell as much s-f as I wanted at higher advances; it took me back twenty-two novels and a hundred and fifty short stories and the struggle to achieve what I am now deserting, to 1965 when my misguided and somewhat tragic career in science fiction began as the result of conscious decision.

Exposed in the early sixties in sub-acute form to the reality which Kostelanetz chapter, by angry chapter documents, I realized by June of 1965 that it would be impossible for me to make a career in what was my field of choice: as a literary writer. The quarterlies were impenetrable, the coteries omnipresent, the competition murderous, the stultifying control of the publishing houses' literary editors absolute. If I was ever going to achieve outlet as a writer of fiction, I saw I would have to go to the commercial markets, the mass or genre markets that is to say, and while partially converting myself to the strictures of category fiction *sneak in* my literary intentions.

Science fiction was what I chose because from the outset science fiction seemed to be that field in which one could sell stories of modest literary intention with the least amount of slanting: one could, if one touched the base of stricture, be paid a living wage for somewhat ambitious work. Historically the field has been open to new writers and approaches in a way that, say, the mystery never has been. Almost from the beginning I was a "success," that is in terms of my original ambition. As a writer who could write a little in a field where almost no one could write at all, as enough of a cynical hack to purposefully manipulate my work and as one who had an excellent understanding of the field by virtue of childhood reading (indispensable to any who would write a lot of this stuff) I was able, I say in all due modesty, to produce a body of work which is without parallel, quantitatively, in the history of the field. In less than seven years I sold the aforementioned number of works, about two million words in all, I won a major award, I even, for a brief period in 1973/4 had the exhilirating experience of *almost* making a living from the writing of s-f alone. (Only almost. And more than half of my published output has been out of the field from the outset.)

But, I discovered, I was *invisible* outside of the confines of the s-f market itself. Of course that was what I had wanted, what had attracted me to the field. Kostelanetz's academic/literary nexus

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either does not know we exist or patronizes us as pulp hacks for escapist kids; in any case they leave us alone and enable us to be probably the only medium (but less so than in years past) for dangerous, ambitious work. But if you win, you lose; my ambition had turned upon itself. I had beaten the system by getting out of the system, but the system wouldn't be beaten after all because it would not acknowledge that I existed and that made my work meaningless. Also I was getting knifed up pretty good *inside* s-f. Ambitious writers always do; historically the field has silenced or reduced to ineffectiveness its best writers. There is not a single American s-f writer over the age of forty-five, whose work is the equal of what it was a decade ago, if it even exists.

So there I was: devil and the deep blue sea.

Denied as a literary writer, loathed and largely isolated within s-f. Let us sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings. Let us shed one tear and no more. Have mercy, friends, I suffered.

But I also decided to get out. Where yet I am not sure; perhaps to the field of the commercial novel, perhaps into something else, perhaps into light manufacturing or the processing of ceramic mix. Who is to say? One way or the other I will work my way through; I always have, this is my problem and not that of my audience (which, although small by s-f standards has been huge by literary standards and surprisingly loyal. Thank you all very much.) I am not to burden you. I come not to discomfit.

I come, folks, only to say, that this is for the last time: I am getting out. Kostelanetz, like all the rest of humanity, is a mixture of the good and the bad; he is right and he is wrong, he is dull and he is brilliant but the argument holds and so does mine. No future here. Perhaps no future for writing in our time. But thank you all very much.

AFTERWORD

December 6, 1975: On this date, the first copies of my 38-story, 160,000 word Pocket Books collection, *The Best of Barry N. Malzberg* are available and in my hands and having them forces, in all fairness, a postscript to this bitter essay.

It is true that I must leave science fiction. As the vise of the seventies comes down upon all of us in every field of the so-called arts, there is almost no room left for the kind of work which I try to do. But it is also true that this collection — which is a major effort of at least

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intermittent literary intention and execution — would not even exist, nor would the career it capsules, have come to be had it not been for science fiction, which gave me a market, an audience, and a receptivity to my work that I would never have found elsewhere. In this sense I owe my career and large pieces of my personal life as well to science fiction. (Such a career as it has been.)

Where else could an unknown writer whose only virtues (other than a modicum of talent) were energy, prolificity and a gathering professionalism be able to write and sell twenty-three novels and five collections of some literary intention in a period of less than eight years? Even if I had satisfied my original ambitions I would have been dealing with a market which held me back, not only quantitatively but in terms of "artistic" growth. The only limits which sf imposed upon me (until 8/74 when the bottom fell out) were those framed by my willingness or unwillingness to turn out work of such pretension for what was, inevitably, an audience not intersecting with the academic/literary nexus. That is not a very large sin on the scale of things. Not at all.

I want to make it clear on December 6, 1975: I *love* this field. My debt to it is incalculable. What has happened to writers like myself, Silverberg, Ballard, Disch, is not the fault of the category itself (which allowed us to go as far as we wanted artistically for a while) or necessarily even the audience. The fault, as in most other aspects of America, is in what has happened to squeeze diversity from our culture in the last five years. I was either twenty years too late or twenty years too early for this kind of work: even so — didn't I? — I got the work done.

And some of it, dammit, will live.

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Seeking Assistance

by BARRY N. MALZBERG

Well, in my stumbling way. I look for help, beg what favors I may, otherwise try to stay within myself. The world, perhaps, is too much with me. For diversion, however, to fill the interstices, I collect injustices.

Not only do I collect: injustice is a fine cocktail but a poor meal, roiling the blood as it does, damaging the complexion, doing complex things to the digestion otherwise indifferent. To collect must be to seek excretion. To witness is to sanction, to respond, then to move to a higher, better plane. I have worked this out for myself. All on my own.

In New York a radio announcer makes a foul pun on the name of a forgotten writer. I go to the typewriter, prepare the envelope and stamp it first (this assuring I will go through with the act), then content. *Dear X: It is the lowest of all criticism to make fun of a person's name.* Months elapse but X, devastated or indifferent, does not reply. For a while I listen to his program waiting for him to make fun of *my* name (I am also a forgotten writer), but no luck. Eventually I realize that he will not respond, that there is nothing he can say. Meanwhile, fortunately, there are other outrages to busy me. A feminist calls the male orgasm bestial. I write her a scurrilous letter. Someone in California insults my life style in a privately printed magazine. I deal with this. Municipal scandal is defended editorially in the local paper: the writer says they all do it. *Dear Y:* You *do it; I do not.* The letter languishes unpublished; yet I do not falter in my righteousness.

And still more. Injustice is not only within the public domain. My elder daughter's substitute teacher refuses to allow her to go to the bathroom. I confront the principal. My wife refuses sex (at least with me), saying that my constant rages drive her to distraction. I rage at her. A car-pool lady forgets to pick up my younger child at this address even though specific instructions were furnished, and, humiliatingly, I am forced to drive her to Wonder Waffles myself. In five brisk one-line paragraphs I deal with the car-pool lady, whom I have passed several times in the supermarket unrecognized, she in a housecoat and curlers, crying and absently fingering bread. I suspect menopausal shock; allowances ought to

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be made. But allowances bespeak compromise, acceptance, collaboration. Give the world a little nod of assent, and the next time it will clean you out in an alley. One must be at ready. Constant ready. This is not to say that I enjoy my work. I do it sadly, lacking pleasure.

II

My wife says, "Presidents are criminals. Vietnam falls; millions dead or devastated. Innocent die in prison, felons take full pardons. What does it matter if the car-pool lady did not come? The Mafia control everything. Why do you listen to the radio? You cannot clean up the world personally."

The woman is right. (Even though she will use sex as a weapon, not a charming habit.) Still, she sees nothing at all. Vietnam is overseas, the Mafia is invisible, whereas the car-pool lady is part of my life. One cannot deal with the felonious heads of state; yet the car-pool lady weeps in Pantry Pride. The demon that moves within the one lurks near the stained heart of the other. One must do what one can; one must try to resolve what is within one's means. The two million Vietnamese dead can gain nothing from me, but if I can scour the corruption in circumstance which promises similar, more private, evil...*Hey, Y: Your latest statement is incredibly dumb even for you.* Herzog dealt with the dead; my communications are saved for the living. The dead are beyond us. For a time. Technology has not yet found a way to make them a market. When this final breakthrough is accomplished, there will be time enough to deal with the dead.

III

At night I hover birdlike over my wife, who is, of course, not cooperating. Her eyes are distracted; small waves of concentration which mimic frenzy weave their embattled way across her cheekbones. It is hopeless in the extreme, and yet I have physical needs which must be met if my life and career will continue. One cannot carry more than a single, fine obsession at any given time.

Concentration in her expression, distraction in her movement. Surely there is paradox, and at some quiet, pastoral moment I will have to give this consideration: for now it is merely essential that I finish. Moan. Groan. Snaffle. Terminus. Terminus est. *Terminus est in Deo, Kyrie Eleison,* I mumble and depart from her gracefully. One breast trails underneath my elbow semiattached, breaks moist contact like a petal falling from the inner surfaces of a flower. I lie to one side of her, rotating ceilingward, staring at crosshatches,

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considering my fate.

"You don't think," she says.

I think.

IV

While the television news discusses gang-rape, my daughters fall into vicious battle. The elder wants her place on the couch, but the younger feels that she is displaced and kicks back wildly, striking the elder in the eye. Tears and screams: underneath in a huddle of attention my wife and I consider dispatches from victims. There is, after all, very little to be done about children at this stage of their lives. The situation is hopeless. One must cultivate patience and accept one's inability to change matters.

V

Oh B, oh B: have you no compassion? No concern? These are not people you discuss, not within your cold mind you have made them statistics? But you delude yourself for they are human just as you and I, they bleed and sweat, they cannot be reduced to the level of abstraction. The machinery of contemporary technology has given us opportunities unparalleled to reduce people to the level of abstractions. I accept the dilemma this poses for the conscience stricken, the opportunity for the conscienceless. But the revolution awaits.

VI

The car-pool lady and I have begun a discreet affair. Outside of her stained housecoat she is not unattractive, nor does she weep (the stains must depress her), and she is only thirty-eight. How our affair began is still mysterious to me, and I am not sure that there is a logical explanation nor justification. After all, in this quiet, working-class neighborhood discovery would be disastrous, and her husband, who labors nearby, often comes home early or for lunch. Risk however heightens the conversation of our blood: I move within her feeling thin, poised, dartlike and attentive to her cool innards. In the damp touch of her palms I feel the invocation of blessedness.

Seen this way, the car-pool lady is not lacking in quality. It was cruel of me to so despise her without knowing her pain as I do now and as she does mine. She disagrees however that anything may be done about the rectification of injustice; she feels that writing letters is disagreeable, even hopeless, and that it would be better to turn these energies toward personal salvation. I cannot say that she is wrong, and later, inflamed by her advice, I penetrate her deeply, thin genitals firm, firm voice shrieking thinly.

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VII

My serious work fails again of acceptance. Unquestionably my career has reached an abyss, as has the question of age: older is no longer better. Like many men of my age and modest creative gifts I am seemingly condemned to spending the rest of my working life doing as I have without possibility of wider acceptance. Also the rejections are incomprehending. I feel that my work is not only being turned away, it is being turned away without having been noticed. Even my protests have a curiously insubstantial feel as they are stuffed into envelopes: they seem to disintegrate in my hand, vanished before they have departed. Often I have the feeling of functioning in a vacuum then, although, thanks to the car-pool lady, whom I now see twice a week in a regularized way, I intimate that the vacuum does not pertain to my personal life but is more generalized.

VIII

Today my left hand vanished.

IX

In the evening a caller to a local radio talk show makes a filthy comment about someone I respect. Reaching hastily for the telephone (I have bandaged the stump of the other hand in a makeshift but serviceable fashion; furthermore no one here has noticed my disability, we have not looked at one another in years), I dial numbers shakily, wait through the gasping sounds of wire and finally hear the host on seven-second delay. Radio off. "Swine," I say, "swine, does no one care?" I seem to have more in mind, but my throat is choked by little burbles and shrieks, and I can say no more. Sobbing as well. After a time the host rings off, and I am left with the dead phone against my lips, my lips pursed against the blank holes in a hiss, my tongue casually flicking over the darkness. I turn on the radio but my moment has long passed.

X

M: This must stop. It cannot continue. It is completely unfair that we live in conditions like this. What are we, beasts? Can we not measure our humanity in ways other than self-loathing?

XI

The car-pool lady says that our affair must continue; otherwise she will kill herself. (I have been thinking of getting out.) She does not seem disturbed by the absence of my left hand until I wave the stump before her, and then she says that it hardly matters. She has lived without legs for years.

Only then, looking down at her, at the expanse of blanket below her

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waist where legs should be, do I see that this is true. Prostheses, she says. Detachable and adjustable.

XII

Daughters, oh daughters: you must stop this it is too much already and I cannot bear.

XIII

My right foot is shriveled, and I have developed, in compensation, a rather fetching limp. Messages of support flood the President for his courageous recent actions. We are shown, on evening news, the stacks of letters on his desk.

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"This particular gem has an interesting curse attached to it . . .!"

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ALL GALL

My wife, Janet, who is a physician, has troubles with me. She is extremely diet-conscious while, I myself, having always enjoyed an iron digestion, ask only that the portions be healthy in size and worry about the healthy-in-content afterward if at all.*

She is therefore more than a little irritated over the fact that one of my current projects is the writing of a rather large book on diet and nutrition. This came up, particularly, once when we were having brunch at the house of my brother, Stan.

My sister-in-law, Ruth, having dished up a delightful and complicated dish, at the base of which was scrambled eggs, reserved for herself a portion approximately the size of the end-joint of the little finger.

Janet looked at her inquiringly. "Is that all you want?" she asked.

"I keep thinking of cholesterol," said Ruth.

At once Janet turned to me and, with an air of loving concern, said to me, plaintively, "Why don't *you* think of cholesterol, Isaac?"

"I do," I said squaring my

**No, I am not fat, I weigh 180 pounds, just enough to lend me an air of attractive resilience.*

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

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elbows and preparing to dig in to my plateful. "I think of it all the time. I *love* it."

Whereupon Janet said with a sigh, "How can they possibly ask you to write a book on diet and nutrition?"

And my brother, Stan, said, with a grin, "Like asking Hitler to write a history of the Jews."

After that, what can I do but write an article on cholesterol?

The story of cholesterol starts with the liver, an organ characteristic of vertebrates and not found in any other form of life. It is the largest gland in the human body, weighing three to four pounds, and is the most important chemical factory of the body. Among other things, it secretes a juice which flows through a duct into the first part of the small intestine, where it mixes with the food that has come churning out of the stomach.

The liver secretion possesses no enzyme and does not directly digest any portion of the food. It does, however, contain substances with detergent properties that accelerate the breakup of fat globules in the food into tiny droplets. This makes it easier for fat-digesting enzymes secreted by other glands to attack the fat.

The secretion formed by the liver is called "gall" from an old Anglo-Saxon word for "yellow," since the fresh juice has a yellowish cast. The secretion is also called "bile" from a Latin word of uncertain derivation. The Greek term for the secretion is "chole." All three terms, Anglo-Saxon, Latin and Greek, find their way into English words having some connection with the secretion. For instance, the duct through which the secretion passes is called the "bile duct."

The ancient Greek physicians considered two varieties of bile to exist, "black bile" and yellow bile." In this, they were wrong, for there is only one bile, though it may differ in color, depending on the state of its freshness.

The ancient medical theories had it that when anyone suffered an overproduction of black bile, he was given to sadness and was "melancholic" (from a Greek phrase meaning "black bile"). An overproduction of yellow bile meant a person was given to anger and was "choleric." Note "chole" in both words. Both "bile" and "gall" are also used to refer to human emotions such as rage and rancor.

The liver manufactures about half a liter (1 pint) of bile a day. It doesn't pour it into the small intestine continuously, however; that would be wasteful. The bile is vented only when the food enters the small intestine.

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In between meals, the bile that is formed is stored in a special sac called the "gall bladder," a pear-shaped organ about 5 to 7 centimeters (2 to 3 inches) in length. The gall bladder has a capacity of about 50 milliliters (3 cubic inches).

Once bile is stored, water is reabsorbed through the walls of the gall bladder so that the bile grows steadily more concentrated as it waits to be used. At maximum, it is 10 to 12 times as concentrated as the original bile and can therefore hold the active ingredients of over a day's supply of the material. As food enters the small intestine, the walls of the gall bladder contract and the concentrated bile squeezes into the small intestine.

Among the ingredients of the bile, there are three substances that have the potential of causing trouble: 1) calcium salts, 2) bilirubin, a pigment which gives bile its color, and 3) cholesterol. All three are relatively insoluble and all three remain in solution in the bile only with difficulty. As the water is withdrawn from the bile stored in the gall bladder, the difficulty of keeping those compounds in solution increases.

In some cases, one or two or all three precipitate out of solution to form "gallstones."* The chances of forming gallstones seem to be connected with sexual factors (it is more common in women than in men), with hereditary factors (it is more common in fair people than in dark people, more common in Jews than in Japanese), and with diet (more common in fat people than in thin people). Also, since fat in food apparently stimulates the flow of bile and increases the chance of stone formation, gallstones are more common in those with a high-fat diet than in those with a low-fat diet.

The gallstones may be very tiny, almost like a fine grit, or may be so large that one will almost fill the gall bladder. Usually, they are pea-sized. They become particularly troublesome when they block the duct leading from the gall bladder, in which case they can produce severe abdominal pain and, eventually, can damage the liver. Often, the best treatment is to remove the gall bladder. This hampers the efficiency of bile function but not enough to prevent people from living perfectly normal lives minus their gall bladder.

** This chance fact gives me the opportunity of observing, with my usual brilliance that "All gall is divided into three parts" and also hands me the title for the essay. If, however, you've never heard of Julius Caesar's remark about Gaul, all this brilliance is wasted on you.*

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From the chemical standpoint, gallstones are associated with the French chemist, Michel Eugene Chevreul, who is remarkable for being the longest-lived of the first-magnitude scientists. Born in 1786, he died in 1889 at the age of 102.6 years. He was still an active scientist in his tenth decade and, indeed, founded gerontology, the study of old age, using (who else) himself as his subject. His 100th birthday was celebrated by chemists everywhere with terrific enthusiasm and he was hailed as "the Nestor of science."

What concerns us, however, is the fact that in 1823, while he was still a mere toddler in his thirties, he investigated gallstones and isolated from them a fatty substance of a pearly appearance. He thought it was solidified bile, and so he called it "cholesterin" from Greek words meaning "solid bile."

It took over a century for the chemical structure of the cholesterin molecule to be completely worked out. The molecule is made up of 74 atoms, of which 27 are carbon atoms arranged in four connected rings and three side chains. Two of the side chains possess one carbon atom each and the third contains eight carbon atoms.

Attached to the 27 carbon atoms are a total of 45 hydrogen atoms and one oxygen-hydrogen combination (a hydroxyl group). The hydroxyl group is characteristic of alcohols and to the name of alcohols, the suffix "-ol" is commonly added. Hence, as the structure of cholesterin became better known, its name was altered to "cholesterol," and that is how it is known today.

Cholesterol is one of a family of compounds, all with the same four-ring system and the attached hydroxyl group. Together, they are known as "sterols." As far as we know every plant and animal cell, whether a unicellular organism or part of a multicellular one, contains sterols. Clearly, they are essential to the cellular machinery; we can see that. The only trifling catch to this is that we don't know exactly *why* they are essential to the cellular machinery. No one has yet established exactly what they do.

Although plant cells and animal cells both have sterols, they don't have the same sterols. All animal cells contain cholesterol, but no plant cell does, and there are no known exceptions to this rule. An example of a plant sterol is stigmasterol, which differs from cholesterol in having a ten-carbon side chain in place of the eight-carbon one. Ergosterol, which occurs in one-celled plants such as yeast, splits the difference and has a nine-carbon side chain. Whereas cholesterol contains 27 carbon atoms,

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ergosterol has 28 and stigmasterol 29.

As far as we know, no animal cell lacks the ability to make its own cholesterol out of very simple two-carbon fragments, universally present in any cell that is not actually starving to death. This means that no animal must depend on its diet as a source of cholesterol.

In particular, human beings do not need cholesterol in the diet. Human cells can make their own. To see the significance of this fact, let's start over.

Plants can make all the components of their cellular tissue out of the simple molecules of soil and air. They have to, since that's all they get to start with, and any particular plant that couldn't be entirely self-sufficient would have to die.

Animals, however, which eat plants (or which eat animals which eat plants, or which eat animals which eat animals which eat plants — however many animals in the food chain, it always comes down to plants in the end) obtain a variety of complicated molecules in their food. For the most part, they break these down to simpler fragments and rebuild their own varieties of complicated molecules.

A number of animals have, however, lost the ability to manufacture all the different atom-combinations necessary to their functioning out of the simple breakdown-products of food materials. Some atom-combinations must be extracted from the food intact, must be absorbed and utilized in that form. If the atom-combinations are not present in the food, the animal must do without; if it cannot do without, it must die.

These dietarily-essential compounds must fulfill two criteria. For one thing they must contain unusual atom-combinations, not present in sizable quantity in other tissue components. If this were not so, the dietarily-essential material could be formed from the other components and it would not be dietarily-essential.

Secondly, the dietarily-essential compounds must be needed in relatively small quantities, as otherwise the organism would be taking too great a risk to rely on its being present in food in quantities sufficient for need.

This sounds as though I think organisms are acting purposefully in organizing their chemical properties, but that's not it, of course. The blind path of evolution is sufficient. If, through chance, a particular organism is born with a dietary need for something it requires in large quantities, the chances are it won't get enough and it will die. Only those organisms born,

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by chance, with reasonable dietary requirements, make it.

But why have any special dietary needs at all? Wouldn't a cell or an organism be better off if it made all its own atom-combinations out of the simplest possible starting materials, and depended on its diet only for those substances invariably present everywhere? Not necessarily.

To be completely self-sufficient would mean the loading down of each cell with quantities of chemical machinery designed to manufacture all potentially useful atom-groupings. By clearing out the machinery for those groupings needed in minor amounts and relying on the diet for those, room is made, so to speak, for other machinery more necessary to the complex physiological functioning of advanced animal organs such as the brain. In short, we trade a little clumsiness in the diet, for virtuosity in other directions.

These dietarily-essential substances are very noticeable to us, since it is possible to lack them and be in trouble, whereas we can't lack the substances we can manufacture at will (short of starvation). We therefore get the idea that the dietarily-essential substances are *particularly* important. We even drop the reference to the diet, and speak of "essential fatty acids," "essential amino acids," "essential vitamins" and so on. We get the idea that everything else is non-essential.

Quite the reverse. These vitamins and other substances are indeed essential. Within the body, however, are even more essential substances, substances so essential that they dare not be left to the diet, and so do not impinge upon our attention.

In other words, the mere fact you don't need cholesterol in the diet shows how important cholesterol is to your body chemistry.

And there's convenience there. If you're a complete vegetarian and eat no animal products (not only no meat, but no fish, no butter, no milk, no eggs) then you have no cholesterol in your diet, none at all. Nevertheless your body does not suffer. It can break down any sterols it does get into two-carbon fragments, throw them into the general hopper of such fragments and then, out of them, build all the cholesterol it needs. It could do this even if it got no sterols of any kind to begin with.

If a person *does* eat animal food, the cholesterol it contains is absorbed (rather inefficiently) and is added to the body's supply directly.

Since cholesterol is water-insoluble and fat-soluble (these two properties almost invariably go together in the case of carbon-containing compounds), it is found in the fatty portions of animal foods, in eggyolk, in mild fat (and in cream and butter), in the marbling of the meat.

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If, for any reason, you, like my sister-in-law, Ruth, wish to go easy on cholesterol, you eschew eggs, cream, butter, bacon, you trim the fat off your meat and so on. If you really want to cut it all the way, you become a strict vegetarian.

Why be concerned to lower the cholesterol in the diet? Obviously because there is some desire not to encourage the body to make more of its own even as more floods in from the intestines. Unfortunately, the ideal isn't always attained. If the body's cholesterol-synthesizing machinery doesn't respond perfectly, an unusual amount of cholesterol in the diet may result in an unusual amount of cholesterol in the body.

The total cholesterol content of a man weighing 77 kilograms (170 pounds) is 250 grams (8¾ ounces.) The body, in other words is about ⅓ of 1 percent cholesterol. It's not really a very minor constituent.

Tissues generally can form their own cholesterol. The chief cholesterol-former for the body as a whole, however, is the liver. The liver secretes cholesterol into the blood stream so that it is available wherever needed.

The quantity of cholesterol in the blood is about 200 milligrams for every hundred milliliters, the normal range fluctuating from 150 to 250. The blood is thus about 1/5 of one percent cholesterol, rather poorer in it than is the body generally.

The cholesterol of the body is the raw material for a number of important compounds chemically related to it and therefore called "steroids" ("sterol-like"). The hormones of the adrenal cortex, cortisone, for instance, are steroids. The sex hormones are steroids. In the bile there are "bile acids" that are steroids, and so on. All these steroids make up a minor portion of the body, however. Most of cholesterol remains cholesterol and is used as such.

The portion of the body that is richest in cholesterol is the nervous system. There we can encounter masses of nerve cells which, in bulk, have a grayish appearance, and are therefore referred to as "gray matter."

The nerve cells have fibers extending outward in all directions, and generally have one particularly long fiber called the "axon." The axon is sheathed in fatty insulation and that portion of the brain which consists of massed axons is called, from the white appearance of the fat, "white matter."

Nerve cells work by producing tiny electric potentials which travel along the various fibers, particularly the axon, as "nerve impulses." These

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impulses manage to jump from fiber to fiber across narrow gaps, and the entire working of the nervous system depends on those electric phenomena not leaking away.

Animals such as squids solve the problem by making the axon quite thick so as to lower the resistance and make it very easy for the tiny impulses to stay in the axon, rather than to stray out of it.

Among the vertebrates, the problem is solved by having the axons surrounded by the fatty insulation I've already mentioned, a so-called "myelin sheath." The myelin sheath probably acts in an insulating fashion, but that can't be its only function. If it were just a matter of insulation, simple fat molecules would do. Instead, the myelin sheath contains quite complex fat-like molecules, including a number that do not appear in noticeable amounts outside the nervous system.

The myelin sheath may serve to maintain the integrity of the axon, which sometimes stretches so far from the cell proper that one could scarcely expect that cell to control and coordinate all those far-distant molecules. Then, too, the myelin sheath must somehow act to increase the speed of the nerve impulse. In general, the thinner the axon, the greater the resistance, and the slower the impulse. With a sheath, however, the nerve impulse moves along the thin vertebrate axon with remarkable speed. It can pass from end to end of a tall man in the fiftieth of a second.

Among the compounds present in the myelin sheath is cholesterol. Cholesterol makes up about 1 percent of the weight of gray matter, and 4 percent of the weight of white matter, since two out of every five molecules in the myelin sheath are cholesterol. Since we don't know exactly what the myelin sheath does, we certainly don't know what the cholesterol does to contribute to its working.

Still, there is no doubt that whatever cholesterol does, it is essential to the myelin sheath, that the myelin sheath is essential to the nervous system, and that the nervous system is essential to us.

So far, then, cholesterol seems like a good guy and there is every tendency to clap the liver on its back and say, "Go ahead, make a lot."

There is a tendency, however, for cholesterol and other fatty materials to settle out of the blood and onto the inner walls of the medium and large arteries.

When this happens, the walls are thickened and hardened. In general, such a condition is called "hardening of the arteries", or "arteriosclerosis" which is the same phrase in Greek. The particular kind of hardening

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which results from the deposition of fatty substances on the inner walls is called "Atherosclerosis." The prefix is from a Greek word for "meal" because the fatty deposits have a mealy appearance.

The atherosclerotic deposits can lead to a variety of very bad results. Since the artery wall is thickened, the bore is narrowed so that less blood can be carried. Vital organs can be starved for oxygen and this has its worst effect when the heart is starved. The heart can't afford to be starved, and when the coronary arteries become atherosclerotic, the agonizing pains of angina pectoris result.

Then, too, the thickened arterial walls lose flexibility. Ordinarily, when the heart contracts and a stream of blood slams into the main arteries, the walls expand making room for the blood and reducing the pressure against themselves. With the loss of flexibility, the arteries do not expand as much as they should and the blood pressure goes up. Under the battering of the high blood pressure, the walls of the arteries undergo further degenerative changes and some may even rupture.

Again, the atherosclerotic layer has a rough surface as opposed to the smooth surface of the healthy arterial wall. The roughness encourages clot-formation, and once in a while such a clot may break loose and go swirling along the blood stream. It may then, just possibly, lodge in one of the smaller arteries in such a way as to block the blood stream through that artery altogether.

When this happens in one of the arteries leading to the heart, you have "coronary thrombosis," the familiar "heart attack." The portion of the heart muscle fed by that artery dies, and life can continue (subject to the probability of other attacks for the same reason), but if the blockage is serious enough, death can follow quickly.

If the clot blocks one of the arteries in the brain, you experience a stroke. Here again, death can follow quickly, or a portion of the brain will die and the patient will survive. However, partial brain death is more serious than partial heart-death, for the former will lead to paralysis of one sort or another, permanent or, if other parts of the brain can take over, temporary.

Atherosclerosis and allied circulatory disorders are becoming an ever-more important cause of death. They cause more deaths than all other causes combined.

Nor is it entirely a question of medical success in other directions. True, many diseases have been brought under control so that people nowadays avoid dying of diphtheria and typhoid fever and pneumonia and

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appendicitis, and can live on till their circulatory system fails. That, however, isn't the whole answer. More and more comparatively young people are dying of circulatory disorders.

One hint lies in the fact that these disorders are a disease of the prosperous. Atherosclerosis is more common in affluent nations and classes than in poor ones.

One fact of prosperity is that there is a diet that goes along with it. Prosperous people eat more food than poor people do, and more expensive food — which means more animal food.

Eating animal food means eating cholesterol, and since cholesterol is found in the atherosclerotic deposits, there might be a connection. As long ago as 1914, it was found that when rabbits were fed large amounts of cholesterol, atherosclerosis could be induced. (Rabbits in the ordinary course of nature never eat cholesterol, since they are herbivores, and their body mechanism is ill-equipped to withstand this abnormal dietary flood.)

Studies have shown that with high dietary cholesterol, there is a tendency to produce a level of cholesterol in the blood that is higher than normal, and, therefore, an increase in the tendency to atherosclerosis.

If this were all there was to it, then matters would be simple. There are, as it happens, other factors. Some saturated fatty acids, when present in the diet, tend to increase blood cholesterol levels, while some unsaturated fatty acids tend to decrease it.

Then, too, there are factors that encourage atherosclerosis even where cholesterol is not directly involved. Smoking is an example. There are three times as many heart attacks among smokers as among non-smokers, and the incidence of fatal heart attacks is five times as high. (Consequently, any smoker who cuts down on dietary cholesterol while continuing to smoke — and feels virtuous about it — is a jackass.)

Hereditary factors have their effect, too, as do life-styles, psychological attitudes and so on.

There are no simple ways of absolutely avoiding atherosclerosis and thus increasing the chances you will live long. But you can try several strategies. You can eliminate the tobacco habit if you're an addict. You can indulge in moderate exercise, avoid stressful situations, cultivate a serene disposition, and, if you are overweight, reduce.

Also, you can cut down the cholesterol intake, if you're overdoing it. It isn't so difficult to trim the fat off the meat, and to use leaner cuts in the first place, or to reduce the intake of eggs, butter and bacon, and —

(Good heavens, Janet, I may be talking myself into it.)

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Robert Aickman won an award at the First World Fantasy Convention in Providence last Fall for his short story, "Pages From a Young Girl's Journal," (February 1973). Here is another first-rate tale from a contemporary master of the supernatural horror story.

The Hospice

by ROBERT AICKMAN

It was somewhere at the back of beyond. Maybury would have found it difficult to be more precise.

He was one who, when motoring outside his own territory, preferred to follow a route "given" by one of the automobile organizations; and on this very occasion, as on other previous ones, he had found reason to deplore all deviation. This time it had been the works manager's fault. The man had not only poured ridicule on the official route but had also stood at the yard gate in order to make quite certain that Maybury set off by the short cut which, according to him, all the fellows in the firm used and which departed in the exactly opposite direction.

The most that could be said was that Maybury was presumably at the outer edge of the immense West Midlands conurbation. The outer edge it by now surely must be, as he seemed to have been driving for hours since he left the works, going round and round in large or small circles, asking the way and being unable to understand the answers (when answers were vouchsafed), all the time seemingly more off-course than ever.

Maybury looked at his watch. He *had* been driving for hours. By rights he should have been more than halfway home — considerably more. Even the dashboard light seemed feebler than usual, but by it Maybury saw that soon he would be out of gasoline. His mind had not been on that particular matter of fuel.

Dark though it was, Maybury was aware of many trees, mountainous and opaque. It was not, however, that there were no houses. Houses there must be, because on both sides of the road there were gates, broad single gates, commonly painted white: and even

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where there were no gates, there were dim entrances. Presumably it was a costly nineteenth century housing estate. Almost identical roads seemed to curve away in all directions. The straightforward had been genteely avoided. As often in such places, the racer-through, the taker of a short cut, was quite systematically penalized. Probably this attitude accounted also for the failure to bring the street lighting fully up to date.

Maybury came to a specific bifurcation. It was impossible to make any reasoned choice, and he doubted whether it mattered much in any case.

Maybury stopped the car by the side of the road, then stopped the engine in order to save the waning gasoline while he thought. In the end, he opened the door and stepped out into the road. He looked upwards. The moon and stars were almost hidden by the thick trees. It was quiet. The houses were set too far from the road for any noise of the television sets to be heard, or the blue glare thereof seen. Pedestrians are nowadays rare in such a district at any hour, but now there was no traffic either, nor sound of traffic more remote. Maybury was disturbed by the silence.

He advanced a short distance on foot, as one does at such times. In any case, he had no map but only a route from which he had departed quite hopelessly. Nonetheless, even that second and locally preferred route, the one used by all the fellows, had seemed perfectly clear at the time and as the manager had described it. He supposed that otherwise he might not have been persuaded to embark upon it, not even overpersuaded. As things were, his wonted expedient of merely driving straight ahead until one found some definite sign or other indication would be dubious because the gas might run out first.

Parallel with each side of each road was a narrow made-up footway with a central gravelly strip. Beyond the strip to Maybury's left was a wilderness of vegetation, traversed by a ditch, beyond which was the hedge line of the different properties. By the light of the occasional streetlamp, Maybury could see that sometimes there was an owner who had his hedge trimmed and sometimes an owner who did not. It would be futile to walk any further along the road, though the air was pleasantly warm and aromatic. There were Angela and their son Tony awaiting him, and he must resume the fight to rejoin them.

Something shot out at him from the boskage on his left.

He had disturbed a cat, returned to its feral habitude. The

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first he knew of it was its claws, or conceivably its teeth, sunk into his left leg. There had been no question of ingratiation or cuddling up. Maybury kicked out furiously. The strange sequel was total silence. He must have kicked the cat a long way because on the instant there was no hint of it. Nor had he seen the color of the cat, though there was a pool of light at that point on the footway. He fancied he had seen two flaming eyes, but he was not sure even of that. There had been no mew, no scream.

Maybury faltered. His leg really hurt. It hurt so much that he could not bring himself to touch the limb, even to look at it in the lamplight.

He faltered back to the car, and though his leg made difficulties even in starting it, he set off indecisively down the road along which he had just walked. It might well have become a case of its being wise for him to seek a hospital. The deep scratch or bite of a cat might well hold venom, and it was not pleasant to think where the particular cat had been treading or what it might have been devouring. Maybury again looked at his watch. It was fourteen minutes past eight. Only nine minutes had passed since he had looked at it last.

The road was beginning to straighten out, and the number of entrances to diminish, though the trees remained dense. Possibly, as so often happens, the money had run out before the full development had reached this region of the property. There were still occasional houses, with entries at long and irregular intervals. Lampposts were becoming fewer also, but Maybury saw that one of them bore a hanging sign of some kind. It was most unlikely to indicate a destination, let alone a destination of use to Maybury, but he eased and stopped nonetheless, so urgently did he need a clue of some kind. The sign was shaped like a club in a pack of cards, and read:

THE HOSPICE
GOOD FARE
SOME ACCOMMADATION

The modest words relating to accommodation were curved round the downward pointing extremity of the club.

Maybury decided almost instantly. He was hungry. He was injured. He was lost. He was almost without gasoline.

He would enquire for dinner and, if he could telephone home, might even stay the night, though he had neither pajamas nor electric razor. The gate, made of iron and more suited, Maybury would have thought, to a farmyard bullpen, was, nonetheless, wide open. Maybury drove through.

The drive had likewise been surfaced with rather unattractive concrete, and it appeared to have

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been done some time ago, since there were now many potholes, as if heavy vehicles passed frequently. Maybury's headlights bounced and lurched disconcertingly as he proceeded, but suddenly the drive, which had run quite straight, again as on a modern farm, swerved, and there on Maybury's left was The Hospice. He realized that the drive he had come down, if indeed it had been a drive, was not the original main entrance. There was an older, more traditional drive, winding away between rhododendron bushes. All this was visible in bright light from a fixture high above on the cornice of the building, almost a floodlight, Maybury thought. He supposed that a new entry had been made for the vehicles of the various suppliers when the place had become — whatever exactly it had become, a private hotel? a guest house? a club? No doubt the management aspired to cater for the occupants of the big houses, now that there were no longer servants in the world.

Maybury locked the car and pushed at the door of the house. It was a solid Victorian door, and it did not respond to Maybury's pressure. Maybury was discouraged by the need to ring, but he rang. He noticed that there was a second bell, lower down, marked NIGHT. Surely it could not yet be Night? The great thing was to get in, to feed (the works had offered only packaged sandwiches and flavorless coffee by way of luncheon), to ingratiate himself, before raising questions of gas, whereabouts, possible accommodation for the night, a telephone call to Angela, disinfectant for his leg. He did not much care for standing alone in a strange place under the bright floodlight, uncertain what was going to happen.

But quite soon the door was opened by a lad with curly fair hair and an untroubled face. He looked like a young athlete, as Maybury at once thought. He was wearing a white jacket and smiling helpfully.

"Dinner? Yes, certainly, sir. I fear we've just started, but I'm sure we can fit you in."

To Maybury, the words brought back the seaside boarding houses where he had been taken for holidays when a boy. Punctuality in those days had been almost as important as sobriety.

"If you can give me just a couple of minutes to wash ...."

"Certainly, sir. This way, please."

Inside, it was not at all like those boarding houses of Maybury's youth. Maybury happened to know exactly what it *was* like. The effect was that produced by the efforts of an expensive and, therefore, rather old-fashioned, furniture emporium if one placed

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one's whole abode and most of one's check-book in its hands. There were hangings on all the walls, and every chair and sofa was upholstered. Colors and fabrics were harmonious but rich. The several standard lamps had immense shades. The polished tables derived from Italian originals. One could perhaps feel that a few upholstered occupants should have been designed and purveyed to harmonize also. As it was, the room was empty, except for two of them.

The lad held open the door marked *Gentlemen* in script but then followed Maybury in, which Maybury had not particularly expected. But the lad did not proceed to fuss tiresomely with soap and towel, as happens sometimes in very expensive hotels and happened formerly in clubs. All he did was stand about. Maybury reflected that doubtless he was concerned to prevent all possible delay, dinner having started.

The dining room struck Maybury, immediately he entered, as rather too hot. The central heating must be working with full efficiency. The room was lined with hangings similar to those Maybury had seen in the hall, but apparently even heavier. Possibly noise reduction was among the objects. The ceiling of the room had been brought down in the modern manner, as if to serve the stunted, and any window or windows had disappeared behind swathes.

It is true that knives and forks make a clatter, but there appeared to be no other immediate necessity for costly noise abatement, as the diners were all extremely quiet, which at first seemed the more unexpected in that most of them were seated, fairly closely packed, at a single long table running down the central axis of the room. Maybury soon reflected, however, that if he had been wedged together with a party of total strangers, he might have found little to say to them either.

This was not put to the test. On each side of the room were four smaller tables, set endways against the walls, every table set for a single person, even though big enough to accommodate four, two on either side; and at one of these, Maybury was settled by the handsome lad in the white jacket.

Immediately, soup arrived.

The instantaneity of the service (apart from the fact that Maybury was late) could be accounted for by the large number of the staff. There were quite certainly four men, all, like the lad, in white jackets; and two women, both in dark blue dresses. The six of them were noticeably deft and well set up, though all were past their first youth. Maybury could not see more

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because he had been placed with his back to the end wall which contained the service door (as well as, on the other side, the door by which the guests entered from the lounge). At every table, the single place had been positioned in that way, so that the occupant saw neither the service door opening and shutting, nor, in front of him, the face of another diner.

As a matter of fact, Maybury was the only single diner on that side of the room (he had been given the second table down but did not think that anyone had entered to sit behind him at the first table), and on the other side of the room there was only a single diner also, he thought, a lady seated at the second table likewise and thus precisely parallel with him.

There was an enormous quantity of soup in what Maybury realized was an unusually deep and wide plate. The amplitude of the plate had at first been masked by the circumstance that round much of its wide rim was inscribed, in large black letters THE HOSPICE, rather in the style of a baby's plate, Maybury thought, if both lettering and plate had not been so immense. The soup itself was unusually weighty too; it undoubtedly contained eggs as well as pulses, and steps had been taken to add "thickening" also.

Maybury was hungry, as has been said, but he was faintly disconcerted to realize that one of the middle-aged women was standing quietly behind him as he consumed the not inconsiderable number of final spoonfuls. The spoons seemed very large also, at least for modern usages. The woman removed his empty plate with a reassuring smile.

The second course was there. As she set it before him, the woman spoke confidentially in his ear of the third course: "It's turkey tonight." Her tone was exactly that in which promise is conveyed to a little boy of his favorite dish. It was as if she were Maybury's nanny, even though Maybury had never had a nanny, not exactly. Meanwhile, the second course was a proliferating elaboration of pasta, plainly homemade pasta, probably fabricated that morning. Cheese, in fairly large granules, was strewn across the heap from a large porcelain bowl without Maybury being noticeably consulted.

"Can I have something to drink? A lager will do."

"We have nothing like that, sir." It was as if Maybury knew this perfectly well, but she was prepared to play with him. There might, he thought, have been some warning that the place was unlicensed.

"A pity." said Maybury.

The woman's inflections were beginning to bore him, and he was

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wondering how much the rich food, all palpably fresh and home-grown and of almost unattainable quality, was about to cost him. He doubted very much whether it would be sensible to think of staying the night at The Hospice.

"When you have finished your second course, you may have the opportunity of a word with Mr. Falkner." Maybury recollected that, after all, he had started behind all the others. He must doubtless expect to be a little hustled while he caught up with them. In any case, he was not sure whether or not the implication was that Mr. Falkner might, under certain circumstances, unlock a private liquor store.

Obviously it would help the catching-up process if Maybury ate no more than two-thirds of the pasta fantasy. But the woman in the dark-blue dress did not seem to see it like that.

"Can't you eat any more?" she enquired baldly, and no longer addressing Maybury as "Mister."

"Not if I'm to attempt another course," replied Maybury, quite equably.

"It's turkey tonight," said the woman. "You know how turkey just slips down you?" She still had not removed his plate.

"It's very good," said Maybury firmly. "But I've had enough."

It was as if the woman were not used to such conduct, but as this was no longer a nursery, she took the plate away.

There was even a slight pause, during which Maybury tried to look round the room without giving an appearance of doing so. The main point seemed to be that everyone was dressed rather formally: all the men in "dark suits", all the women in "long dresses." There was a wide variety of age, but, curiously, again there were more men than women. Conversation still seemed far from general. Maybury could not help wondering whether the solidity of the diet did not contribute here. Then it occurred to him that it was as if most of these people had been with one another for a long time, during which things to talk about might have run out and possibly with little opportunity for renewal through fresh experience. He had met that in hotels. Naturally, Maybury could not, without seeming rude, examine the one-third of the assembly which was seated behind him.

His slab of turkey appeared. He had caught up, even though by cheating. It was an enormous pile, steaming slightly and also seeping slightly with a colorless oily fluid. With it appeared five separate varieties of vegetable in separate dishes brought on a tray, and a sauceboat, aparently for him alone, of specially compounded fluid,

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dark red and turgid. A sizable mound of stuffing completed the repast. The middle-aged woman set it all before him swiftly but, this time, silently, with unmistakable reserve.

The truth was that Maybury had little appetite left. He gazed around, less furtively, to see how the rest were managing. He had to admit that, as far as he could see, they were one and all eating as if their lives depended on it, old as well as young, female as well as male; it was as if all had spent a long unfed day in the hunting field. "Eating as if their lives depended on it," he said again to himself; then, struck by the absurdity of the phrase when applied to eating, he picked up his knife and fork with resolution.

"Is everything to your liking, Mr. Maybury?"

Again he had been gently taken by surprise. Mr. Falkner was at his shoulder: a sleek man in the most beautiful dinner jacket, an instantly ameliorative maitre d'hotel.

"Perfect, thank you," said Maybury. "But how did you know my name?"

"We like to remember the names of all our guests," said Falkner, smiling.

"Yes, but how did you find out *my* name in the first place?"

"We think we are proficient at that too, Mr. Maybury."

"I am much impressed," said Maybury. Really, he felt irritated (irritated, at least), but his firm had trained him never to display irritation outside the family circle.

"Not at all," said Falkner genially. "Whatever our vocation in life, we may as well do what we can to excel." He settled the matter by dropping the subject. "Is there anything I can get for you? Anything you would like?"

"No, thank you very much. I have plenty."

"Thank *you*, Mr. Maybury. If you wish to speak to me at any time, I am normally available in my office. Now I will leave you to the enjoyment of your meal. I may tell you, in confidence, that there is steamed fruit pudding to follow."

He went quietly forward on his round of the room, speaking to perhaps one person in three at the long central table, mainly, it seemed, to the older people, as was no doubt to be expected. Falkner wore very elegant black suede shoes, which reminded Maybury of the injury to his own leg, about which he had done nothing, though it might well be septic, even endangering the limb itself, perhaps the whole system.

He was considerably enraged by Falkner's performance about his name, especially as he could find no answer to the puzzle. He felt that he had been placed, almost deliber-

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ately, at an undignified disadvantage. Falkner's patronizing conduct in this trifling matter was of a piece with the nannying attitude of the waitress. Moreover, was the unexplained discovery of his name such a trifle, after all? Maybury felt that it had made him vulnerable in other matters also, however undefined. It was the last straw in the matter of his eating any more turkey. He no longer had any appetite whatever.

He began to pass everything systematically through his mind, as he had been trained to do; and almost immediately he surmised the answer. In his car was a blue-bond file which in its front bore his name: Mr. Lucas Maybury; and this file he supposed that he must have left, name upwards, on the front seat, as he commonly did. All the same, the name was merely typed on a sticky label and would not have been easy to make out through the car window. But he then remembered the floodlight. Even so, quite an effort had been necessary on someone's part, and he wondered who had made that effort. Again he guessed the answer: it was Falkner himself who had been snooping. What would Falkner have done if Maybury had parked the car outside the floodlight area? Used a torch? Perhaps even skeleten keys?

That was absurd.

And how much did the whole thing matter? People in business often had these little vanities, and often had he encountered them. People would do almost anything to feed them. Probably he had one or two himself. The great thing when meeting any situation was to extract the essentials and to concentrate upon them.

To some of the people Falkner was speaking for quite a period of time, while, as Maybury noticed, those seated next to them, previously saying little in most cases, now said nothing at all but confined themselves entirely to eating. Some of the people at the long table were not merely elderly, he had observed, but positively senile, drooling, watery-eyed, and almost hairless; but even they seemed to be eating away with the best. Maybury had the horrid idea about them that eating was all they did do. "They lived for eating": another nursery expression, Maybury reflected; and at last he had come upon those of whom it might be true. Some of these people might well relate to rich foods as alcoholics relate to excisable spirits. He found it more nauseating than any sottishness, of which he had seen a certain amount.

Falkner was proceeding so slowly, showing so much professional consideration, that he had

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not yet reached the lady who sat by herself parallel with Maybury on the other side of the room. At her Maybury now stared more frankly. Black hair reached to her shoulders, and she wore what appeared to be a silk evening dress, a real "model," Maybury thought (though he did not really know), in many colors; but her expression was of such sadness, suffering, and exhaustion that Maybury was sincerely shocked, especially as once she must, he was sure, have been beautiful, indeed, in a way, still was. Surely so unhappy, even tragic, a figure as that could not be ploughing through a big slab of turkey with five vegetables? With caution or courtesy, Maybury half rose to his feet in order to look.

"Eat up, sir. Why you've hardly started!" His tormentor had quietly returned to him. What was more, the tragic lady *did* appear to be eating.

"I've had enough. I'm sorry, it's very good, but I've had enough."

"You said that before, sir, and, look, here you are, still eating away."

He knew that he had, indeed, used those exact words. Crises are met by cliches.

"I've eaten quite enough."

"That's not necessarily for each of us to say, is it?"

"I want no more to eat of any kind. Please take all this away and just bring me a black coffee. When the time comes, if you like. I don't mind waiting."

Though Maybury did mind waiting, it was necessary to remain in control.

The woman did the last thing Maybury could have expected her to do. She picked up his laden plate (he had at least helped himself to everything) and, with force, dashed it on the floor. Even then the plate itself did not break, but gravy and five vegetables and rich stuffing spread across the thick, patterned wall-to-wall carpet. Complete, in place of comparative, silence followed in the whole room, though there was still, as Maybury even then observed, the muted clashing of cutlery. Indeed, his own knife and fork were still in his hands.

Falkner returned round the bottom end of the long table.

"Mulligan," he asked, "how many more times?" His tone was as quiet as ever. Maybury had not realized that the alarming woman was Irish.

"Mr. Maybury," Falkner continued, "I entirely understand your difficulty. There is naturally no obligation to partake of anything you do not wish. I am only sorry for what has happened. It must seem very poor service on our part. Perhaps you would prefer to go into our lounge? Would you care simply for some coffee?"

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"Yes," said Maybury, concentrating upon the essential. "I should, please. Indeed, I had already ordered a black coffee. Could I possibly have a pot of it?"

He had to step with care over the mess on the floor, looking downwards. As he did so, he saw something most curious. A central rail ran the length of the long table a few inches above the floor. To this rail one of the male guests was attached by a fetter round his left ankle.

Maybury, now considerably shaken, had rather expected to be alone in the lounge until the coffee arrived. But he had no sooner dropped down upon one of the massive sofas (it could easily have seated five in a row, at least two of them stout), than the handsome boy appeared from somewhere and proceeded merely to stand about, as at an earlier phase of the evening. There were no illustrated papers to be seen, nor even brochures about Beautiful Britain, and Maybury found the lad's presence irksome. All the same, he did not dare to say "There's nothing I want." He could think of nothing to say or to do; nor did the boy speak or seem to have anything particular to do either. It was obvious that his presence could hardly be required there when everyone was in the dining room. Presumably they would soon be passing on to fruit pudding. Maybury was aware that he had yet to pay his bill. There was a baffled but considerable pause.

Much to his surprise, it was Mulligan who in the end brought him the coffee. It was a single cup, not a pot; and even the cup was of such a size that Maybury, for once that evening, could have done with a bigger. At once he divined that coffee was outside the regime of the place and that he was being specially compensated, though he might well have to pay extra for it. He had vaguely supposed that Mulligan would have been helping to mop up in the dining room. Mulligan, in fact, seemed quite undistrubed.

"Sugar, sir," she said.

"One lump, please," said Maybury, eyeing the size of the cup.

He did not fail to notice that, before going, she exchanged a glance with the handsome lad. He was young enough to be her son, and the glance might mean anything or nothing.

While Maybury was trying to make the most of his meager coffee and to ignore the presence of the lad, who must surely be bored, the door from the dining room opened, and the tragic lady from the other side of the room appeared.

"Close the door, will you?" she said to the boy. The boy closed the door and then stood about again.

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"Do you mind if I join you?" the lady asked Maybury.

"I should be delighted."

She was really rather lovely in her melancholy way, her dress was as splendid as Maybury had supposed, and there was in her demeanor an element that could only be called stately. Maybury was unaccustomed to that.

She sat, not at the other end of the sofa, but at the center of it. It struck Maybury that the rich way she was dressed might almost have been devised to harmonize with the rich way the room was decorated. She wore complicated, oriental-looking earrings, with pink translucent stones, like rose diamonds (perhaps they *were* diamonds), and silver shoes. Her perfume was heavy and distinctive.

"My name is Cecile Celimena," she said. "How do you do? I am supposed to be related to the composer Chaminade."

"How do you do?" said Maybury. "My name is Lucas Maybury, and my only important relation is Solway Short. In fact he's my cousin."

They shook hands. Her hand was very soft and white, and she wore a number of rings, which Maybury thought looked real and valuable (though he could not really tell). In order to shake hands with him, she turned the whole upper part of her body towards him.

"Who is that gentleman you mention?" she asked.

"Solway Short? The racing motorist. You must have seen him on the television."

"I do not watch the television."

"Quite right. It's almost entirely a waste of time."

"If you do not wish to waste time, why are you at The Hospice?"

The lad, still observing them, shifted, noticeably, from one leg to the other.

"I am here for dinner. I am just passing through."

"Oh! You are going then?"

Maybury hesitated. She was attractive and for the moment he did not wish to go. "I suppose so. When I've paid my bill and found out where I can get some gasoline. My tank's almost empty. As a matter of fact, I'm lost. I've lost my way."

"Most of us here are lost."

"Why here? What makes you come here?"

"We come for the food and the peace and the warmth and the rest."

"A tremendous *amount* of food, I thought."

"That's necessary. It's the restorative, you might say."

"I'm not sure that I quite fit in," said Maybury. And then he added: "I shouldn't have thought that you did either."

"Oh, but I do! Whatever makes

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you think not?" She seemed quite anxious about it, so that Maybury supposed he had taken the wrong line.

He made the best of it. "It's just that you seem a little different from what I have seen of the others."

"In what way, different?" she asked, really anxious, and looking at him with concentration.

"To start with, more beautiful. You are very beautiful." he said, even though the lad was there, certainly taking in every word.

"That is kind of you to say." Unexpectedly she stretched across the short distance between them and took his hand. "What did you say your name is?"

"Lucas Maybury."

"Do people call you Luke?"

"No, I dislike it. I'm not a Luke sort of person."

"But your wife can't call you Lucas?"

"I'm afraid she does." It was a fishing question he could have done without.

"Lucas? Oh, no, it's such a cold name." She was still holding his hand.

"I'm very sorry about it. Would you like me to order you some coffee?"

"No, no. Coffee is not right; it is stimulating, wakeful, overexciting, unquiet." She was gazing at him again with sad eyes.

"This is a curious place," said Maybury, giving her hand a squeeze. It was surely becoming remarkable that none of the other guests had yet appeared.

"I could not live without The Hospice," she replied.

"Do you come here often?" It was a ludicrously conventional form of words.

"Of course. Life would be impossible otherwise. All those people in the world without enough food, living without love, without even proper clothes to keep the cold out."

During dinner it had become as hot in the lounge, Maybury thought, as it had been in the dining room.

Her tragic face sought his understanding. Nonetheless, the line she had taken up was not a favorite of his. He preferred problems to which solutions were at least possible. He had been warned against the other kind.

"Yes," he said. "I know what you mean, of course."

"There are millions and millions of people all over the world with no clothes at all," she cried, withdrawing her hand.

"Not quite," Maybury said, smiling. "Not quite that. Or not yet."

He knew the risks perfectly well and thought as little about them as possible. One had to survive and also to look after one's dependents.

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"In any case," he continued, trying to lighten the tone. "That hardly applies to you. I have seldom seen a more gorgeous dress."

"Yes," she replied with simple gravity. "It comes from Rome. Would you like to touch it?"

Naturally, Maybury would have liked, but, equally naturally, he was held back by the presence of the watchful lad.

"Touch it," she commanded in a low voice. "God, what are you waiting for? Touch it." She seized his left hand again and forced it against her warm silky breast. The lad seemed to take no more and no less notice than of anything else.

"Forget. Let go. What is life for, for God's sake?" There was a passionate earnestness about her which might rob any such man as Maybury of all assessment, but he was still essentially outside the situation. As a matter of fact, he had never in his life lost *all* control, and he was pretty sure by now that, for better or worse, he was incapable of it.

She twisted round until her legs were extended the length of the sofa and her head was on his lap, or more precisely on his thighs. She had moved so deftly as not even to have disordered her skirt. Her perfume wafted upwards.

"Stop glancing at Vincent," she gurgled up at him. "I'll tell you something about Vincent. Though you may think he looks like a Greek god, the simple fact is that he hasn't got what it takes, he's impotent."

Maybury was embarrassed, of course. All the same, what he reflected was that often there were horses for courses, and often no more to be said about a certain kind of situation than that one thing.

It did not matter much what he reflected because, when she had spoken, Vincent had brusquely left the room through what Maybury supposed to be the service door.

"Thank the Lord," he could not help remarking naively.

"He's gone for reinforcements," she said. "We'll soon see."

Where were the other guests? Where, by now, could they be? All the same, Maybury's spirits were authentically rising, and he began caressing her more intimately.

Then, suddenly, it seemed that everyone was in the room at once, and this time all talking and fussing.

She sat herself up, none too precipitately, and with her lips close to his ear, said, "Come to me later. Number Twenty-three."

It was quite impossible for Maybury to point out that he was not staying the night in The Hospice.

Falkner had appeared.

"To bed, all," he cried genially,

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subduing the crepitation on the instant.

Maybury, unentangled once more, looked at his watch. It seemed to be precisely ten o'clock. That, no doubt, was the point. Still it seemed very close upon a heavy meal.

No one moved much, but no one spoke either.

"To bed, all of you," said Falkner again, this time in a tone which might almost be described as roguish. Maybury's lady rose to her feet.

All of them filtered away, Maybury's lady among them. She had spoken no further word, made no further gesture.

Maybury was alone with Falkner.

"Let me remove your cup," said Falkner courteously.

"Before I ask for my bill," said Maybury; "I wonder if you could tell me where I might possibly find some gas at this hour?"

"Are you out of gas?" enquired Falkner.

"Almost."

"There's nothing open at night within twenty miles. Not nowadays. Something to do with our new friends, the Arabs, I believe. All I can suggest is that I syphon some gas from the tank of our own vehicle. It is a quite large vehicle and it has a large tank."

"I couldn't possibly put you to that trouble." In any case, he, Maybury, did not know exactly how to do it. He had heard of it, but it had never arisen before in his own life.

The lad Vincent reappeared, still looking pink, Maybury thought, though it was difficult to be sure with such a glowing skin. Vincent began to lock up, a quite serious process, it seemed, rather as in great-grandparental days, when prowling desperadoes were to be feared.

"No trouble at all, Mr. Maybury," said Falkner. "Vincent here can do it easily, or another member of my staff."

"Well," said Maybury, "if it would be all right ...."

"Vincent," directed Falkner. "Don't bolt and padlock the front door yet. Mr. Maybury intends to leave us."

"Very good," said Vincent, gruffly.

"Now if we could go to your car, Mr. Maybury, you could then drive it round to the back. I will show you the way. I must apologize for putting you to this extra trouble, but the other vehicle takes some time to start, especially at night."

Vincent had opened the front door for them.

"After you, Mr. Maybury," said Falkner.

Where it had been excessively hot within, it duly proved to be

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excessively cold without. The floodlight had been turned off. The moon had "gone in," as Maybury believed the saying was; and all the stars had apparently gone in with it.

Still, the distance to the car was not great. Maybury soon found it in the thick darkness, with Falkner coming quietly step by step behind him.

"Perhaps I had better go back and get a flashlight?" remarked Falkner.

So there duly was a torch. It brought to Maybury's mind the matter of the office file with his name on it, and as he unlocked the car door, there the file was, exactly as he had supposed, and, assuredly, name uppermost. Maybury threw it across to the back seat.

Falkner's flashlight was a heavy-service object which drenched a wide area in cold white light.

"May I sit beside you, Mr. Maybury?" He closed the offside door behind him.

Maybury had already turned on the headlights, flashlight or no, and was now pushing at the starter, which seemed obdurate.

It was not, he thought, that there was anything wrong with it, but rather that there was something wrong with him. The sensation was exactly like a nightmare. He had of course done it hundreds of times, probably thousands of times; but now, when after all it really mattered, he simply could not manage it, had, quite incredibly, somehow lost the simple knack of it. He often endured bad dreams of just this kind. He found time with part of his mind to wonder whether this was not a bad dream. But it was to be presumed not, since now he did not wake, as we soon do when we realize that we are dreaming.

"I wish I could be of some help," remarked Falkner, who had turned off his flashlight, "but I am not accustomed to the make of car. I might easily do more harm than good." He spoke with his usual bland geniality.

Maybury was irritated again. The make of car was one of the commonest there is, trust the firm for that. All the same, he knew it was entirely his own fault that he could not make the car start and not in the least Falkner's. He felt as if he were going mad. "I don't quite know what to suggest," he said and added: "If, as you say, there's no garage."

"Perhaps Cromie could be of assistance." said Falkner. "Cromie has been with us quite a long time and is a wizard with any mechanical problem."

No one could say that Falkner was pressing Maybury to stay the night or even hinting towards it, as one might expect. Maybury won-

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dered whether the funny place was not, in fact, full up. It seemed the most likely answer. Not that Maybury wished to stay the night, far from it.

"I'm not sure," he said, "that I have the right to disturb anyone else."

"Cromie is on night duty," replied Falkner. "He is always on night duty. That is what we employ him for. I will fetch him."

He turned on the flashlight once more, stepped out of the car, and disappeared into the house, shutting the front door behind him, lest the cold air enter.

In the end, the front door reopened, and Falkner re-emerged. He still wore no coat over his dinner suit and seemed to ignore the cold. Falkner was followed by a burly but shapeless and shambling figure, whom Maybury first saw indistinctly standing behind Falkner in the light from inside the house.

"Cromie will soon put things to rights," said Falkner, opening the door of the car. "Won't you Cromie?" It was much as one speaks to a friendly retriever.

But there was little, Maybury felt, that was friendly about Cromie. Maybury had to admit to himself that on the instant he found Cromie alarming, even though, what with one thing and another, there was little to be seen of him.

"Now what exactly seems wrong, Mr. Maybury?" asked Falkner. "Just tell Cromie what it is."

Falkner himself had not attempted to re-enter the car, but Cromie forced himself in and was sprawling in the front seat, next to Maybury, where Angela normally sat. He really did seem a very big, bulging person, but Maybury decisively preferred not to look at him, though the glow cast backwards from the headlights provided a certain illumination.

Maybury could not acknowledge that for some degrading reason he was unable to operate the starter and so had to claim there was something wrong with it. He was unable not to see Cromie's huge, badly misshapen yellow hands, both of them, as he tugged with both of them at the knob, forcing it in and out with such violence that Maybury cried out, "Less force. You'll wreck it."

"Careful, Cromie," said Falkner from outside the car. "Most of Cromie's work is on a big scale," he explained to Maybury.

But violence proved effective, as so often. Within seconds the car engine was humming away.

"Thank you very much," said Maybury.

Cromie made no detectable response, nor did he move.

"Come on out, Cromie," said Falkner. "Come on out of it."

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Cromie duly extricated himself and shambled off into the darkness.

"Now," said Maybury, brisking up as the engine purred. "Where do we go for the gas?"

There was the slightest of pauses. Then Falkner spoke from the dimness outside. "Mr. Maybury, I have remembered something. It is not gasoline that we have in our tank. It is, of course, diesel oil. I must apologize for such a stupid mistake."

Maybury was not merely irritated, not merely scared; he was infuriated. With rage and confusion he found it impossible to speak at all. No one in the modern world could confuse diesel oil and gasoline in that way. But what could he possibly do?

Falkner, standing outside the open door of the car, spoke again. "I am extremely sorry, Mr. Maybury. Would you permit me to make some amend by inviting you to spend the night with us free of all charge, except perhaps for the dinner?"

Within the last few minutes Maybury had suspected that this moment was bound to come in one form or another.

"Thank you," he said less than graciously. "I suppose I had better accept."

"We shall try to make you comfortable," said Falkner.

Maybury turned off the headlights, climbed out of the car once more, shut and, for what it was worth, locked the door, and followed Falkner back into the house. This time Falkner completed the locking and bolting of the front door that he had instructed Vincent to omit.

"I have no luggage of any kind," remarked Maybury, still very much on the defensive.

"That may solve itself," said Falkner, straightening up from the bottom bolt and smoothing his dinner jacket. "There's something I ought to explain. But will you first excuse me a moment?" He went out through the door at the back of the lounge.

Hotels really have become far too hot, thought Maybury. It positively addled the brain.

Falkner returned. "There is something I ought to explain," he said again. "We have no single rooms. partly because many of our visitors prefer not to be alone at night. The best we can do for you in your emergency, Mr. Maybury, is to offer you the share of a room with another guest. It is a large room and there are two beds. It is a sheer stroke of good luck that at present there is only one guest in the room, Mr. Bannard. Mr. Bannard will be glad of your company, I am certain, and you will be quite safe with him. He is a very pleasant person, I can

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assure you. I have just sent a message up asking him if he can possibly come down, so that I can introduce you. He is always very helpful, and I think he will be here in a moment. Mr. Bannard has been with us for some time, so that I am sure he will be able to fit you up with pajamas and so forth."

It was just about the last thing that Maybury wanted from any point of view, but he had learned that it was of a kind that is peculiarly difficult to protest against, without somehow putting oneself in the wrong with other people. Besides, he supposed that he was now committed to a night in the place and therefore to all the implications, whatever they might be, or very nearly so.

"I should like to telephone my wife, if I may," Maybury said. Angela had been steadily on his mind for some time.

"I fear that's impossible, Mr. Maybury," replied Falkner. "I'm so sorry."

"How can it be impossible?"

"In order to reduce tension and keep up the atmosphere that our guests prefer, we have no external telephone. Only an internal link between my quarters and the proprietors."

"But how can you run a hotel in the modern world without a telephone?"

"Most of our guests are regulars. Many of them come again and again, and the last thing they come for is to hear a telephone ringing the whole time with all the strain it involves."

"They must be half round the bend," snapped Maybury, before he could stop himself.

"Mr. Maybury," replied Falkner, "I have to remind you of two things. The first is that I have invited you to be our guest in the fuller sense of the word. The second is that, although you attach so much importance to efficiency, you nonetheless appear to have set out on a long journey at night with very little gas in your tank. Possibly you should think yourself fortunate that you are not spending the night stranded on some motorway."

"I'm sorry," said Maybury, "but I simply must telephone my wife. Soon she'll be out of her mind with worry."

"I shouldn't think so, Mr. Maybury," said Falkner smiling. "Concerned, we must hope, but not quite out of her mind."

Maybury could have hit him, but at that moment a stranger entered.

"Ah, Mr. Bannard," said Falkner, and introduced them. They actually shook hands. "You won't mind, Mr. Bannard, if Mr. Maybury shares your room?"

Bannard was a slender, bony little man of about Maybury's age.

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He was bald with a rim of curly red hair. In the present environment he was quite perky, but Maybury wondered how he would make out in the world beyond. Perhaps, however, this was because Bannard was too shrimplike to look his best in pajamas.

"I should be delighted to share my room with anyone," replied Bannard. "I'm lonely by myself."

"Splendid," said Falkner coolly. "Perhaps you'd lead Mr. Maybury upstairs and lend him some pajamas? You must remember that he is a stranger to us and doesn't yet know all our ways."

"Delighted, delighted!" exclaimed Bannard.

"Well, then," said Falkner. "Is there anything you would like, Mr. Maybury, before you go upstairs?"

"Only a telephone," rejoined Maybury, still recalcitrant. He simply did not believe Falkner. No one in the modern world could live without a telephone, let alone run a business without one. He had begun uneasily to wonder if Falkner had spoken the whole truth about the gasoline and the diesel fuel either.

"Anything you would like that we are in a position to provide, Mr. Maybury?" persisted Falkner, with offensive specificity.

"There's no telephone *here*," put in Bannard, whose voice was noticeable high, even squeaky.

"In that case, nothing," said Maybury. "But I don't know what my wife will do with herself."

"None of us knows that," said Bannard superfluously and cackled for a second.

"Good night, Mr. Maybury. Thank you, Mr. Bannard."

Maybury was almost surprised to discover, as he followed Bannard upstairs, that it seemed a perfectly normal hotel, though overheated and decorated overheavily. On the first landing was a full-size reproduction of a chieftain in scarlet tartan by Raeburn. Maybury knew the picture because it had been chosen for the firm's calendar one year, though ever since they had used girls. Bannard lived on the second floor, where the picture on the landing was smaller, and depicted ladies and gentlemen in riding dress taking refreshments together.

"Not too much noise," said Bannard. "We have some very light sleepers amongst us."

The corridors were down to half illumination for the night watches, and distinctly sinister. Maybury crept foolishly along and almost stole into Bannard's room.

"No," said Bannard in a giggling whisper. "Not Number Thirteen, nor yet Number Twelve A."

As a matter of fact, Maybury had not noticed the number on the

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door that Bannard was now cautiously closing, and he did not feel called upon to rejoin.

"Do be quiet taking your things off, old man," said Bannard softly. "When once you've woken people who've been properly asleep, you can never quite tell. It's a bad thing to do."

It was a large square room, and the two beds were in exactly opposite corners, somewhat to Maybury's relief. The light had been on when they entered. Maybury surmised that even the unnecessary clicking of switches was to be eschewed.

"That's your bed," whispered Bannard, pointing jocularly. He was rapidly taking off his clothes.

So far Maybury had removed only his shoes. He could have done without Bannard staring at him and without Bannard's affable grin.

"Or perhaps you'd rather we did something before settling down?" whispered Bannard.

"No, thank you," replied Maybury. "It's been a long day." He was trying to keep his voice reasonably low, but he absolutely refused to whisper.

"To be sure it has," said Bannard, rising to match the volume that Maybury had employed. "Night-night, then. The best thing is to get to sleep quickly." His tone was similar to that which seemed habitual with Falkner.

Bannard climbed agilely into his own bed and lay on his back peering at Maybury over the sheets.

"Hang your suit in the cupboard," said Bannard, who had already done likewise. "There's room."

"Thank you," said Maybury. "Where do I find the pajamas?"

"Top drawer," said Bannard. "Help yourself. They're all alike."

And, indeed, the drawer proved to be virtually filled with apparently identical suits of pajamas.

"It's between seasons," said Bannard. "Neither proper summer, nor proper winter."

"Many thanks for the loan," said Maybury, though the pajamas were considerably too small for him.

"The bathroom's in there," said Bannard.

When Maybury returned, he opened the door of the cupboard. It was a big cupboard, and it was almost filled by a long line of (presumably) Bannard's suits.

"There's room," said Bannard once more. "Find yourself an empty hanger. Make yourself at home."

While balancing his trousers on the hanger and suspending it from the rail, Maybury again became aware of the injury to his leg. He had hustled so rapidly into

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Bannard's pajamas that, for better or for worse, he had not even looked at the scar.

"What's the matter?" asked Bannard on the instant. "Hurt yourself, have you?"

"It was a damned cat scratched me," replied Maybury, without thinking very much.

But this time he decided to look. With some difficulty and some pain he rolled up the tight pajama leg. It was a quite nasty gash and there was much dried blood. He realized that he had not even thought about washing the wound. In so far as he had been worrying about anything habitual, he had been worrying about Angela.

"Don't show it to me," squeaked out Bannrd, forgetting not to make a noise. All the same, he was sitting up in bed and staring as if his eyes would pop. "It's bad for me to see things like that. I'm upset by them."

"Don't worry," said Maybury. "I'm sure it's not as serious as it looks." In fact, he was far from sure, and he was aware also that it had not been quite what Bannard was concerned about.

"I don't want to know anything about it," said Bannard.

Maybury made no reply but simply rolled down the pajama leg. About his injury too there was plainly nothing to be done. Even a request for Vaseline might lead to hysterics. Maybury tried to concentrate upon the reflection that if nothing worse had followed from the gash by now, then nothing worse might ever follow.

Bannard, however, was still sitting up in bed. He was looking pale. "I come here to forget things like that," he said. "We all do." His voice was shaking.

"Shall I turn the light out?" enquired Maybury. "As I'm the one who's still up."

"I don't usually do that," said Bannard, reclining once more, nonetheless. "It can make things unnecessarily difficult. But there's you to be considered too."

"It's your room," said Maybury, hesitating.

"All right," said Bannard. "If you wish. Turn it out. Tonight anyway." Maybury did his injured leg no good when stumbling back to his bed. All the same, he managed to arrive there.

"I'm only here for one night," he said more to the darkness than to Bannard. "You'll be on your own again tomorrow."

Bannard made no reply, and, indeed, it seemed to Maybury as if he were no longer there, that Bannard was not an organism that could function in the dark. Maybury refrained from raising any question of drawing back a curtain (the curtains were as long

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and heavy as elsewhere), or of letting in a little night air. Things, he felt, were better left more or less as they were.

It was completely dark. It was completely silent. It was far too hot.

Maybury wondered what the time was. He had lost all touch. Unfortunately, his watch lacked a luminous dial.

He doubted whether he would ever sleep, but the night had to be endured somehow. For Angela it must be even harder — far harder. At the best, he had never seen himself as a first-class husband, able to provide a superfluity, eager to be protective. Things would become quite impossible, if he were to lose a leg. But, with modern medicine, that might be avoidable, even at the worst; he should be able to continue struggling on for some time yet.

As stealthily as possible he insinuated himself from between the burning blankets and sheets onto the surface of the bed. He lay there like a dying fish, trying not to make another movement of any kind.

He became almost cataleptic with inner exertion. It was not a promising recipe for slumber. In the end, he thought he could detect Bannard's breathing, far, far away. So Bannard was still there. Fantasy and reality are different things. No one could tell whether Bannard slept or waked, but it had in any case become a quite important aim not to resume general conversation with Bannard. Half a lifetime passed.

There could be no doubt, now, that Bannard was both still in the room and also awake. Perceptibly, he was on the move. Maybury's body contracted with speculation as to whether Bannard in the total blackness was making towards his corner. Maybury felt that he was only half his normal size.

Bannard edged and groped interminably. Of course Maybury had been unfair to him in extinguishing the light, and the present anxiety was doubtless no more than the price to be paid.

Bannard himself seemed certainly to be entering into the spirit of the situation; possibly he had not turned the light on because he could not reach the switch, but there seemed more to it than that. Bannard could be thought of as committed to a positive effort in the direction of silence, in order that Maybury, the guest for a night, should not be disturbed. Maybury could hardly hear him moving at all, though perhaps it was a gamble whether this was consideration or menace. Maybury would hardly have been surprised if the next event had been hands on his throat.

But, in fact, the next event was Bannard reaching the door and

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opening it, with vast delicacy and slowness. It was a considerable anticlimax and not palpably outside the order of nature, but Maybury did not feel fully reassured as he rigidly watched the column of dim light from the passage slowly widen and then slowly narrow until it vanished with the faint click of the handle. Plainly there was little to worry about, after all; but Maybury had probably reached that level of anxiety where almost any new event merely causes new stress. Soon, moreover, there would be the stress of Bannard's return. Maybury half realized that he was in a grotesque condition to be so upset, when Bannard was, in fact, showing him all possible consideration. Once more he reflected that poor Angela's plight was far worse.

Thinking about Angela's plight and how sweet, at the bottom of everything, she really was, Maybury felt more wakeful than ever, as he awaited Bannard's return, surely imminent, surely. Sleep was impossible until Bannard had returned.

But still Bannard did not return. Maybury began to wonder whether something had gone wrong with his own time faculty, such as it was, something, that is, of medical significance. That whole evening and night, from soon after his commitment to the recommended route, he had been in doubt about his place in the universe, about what people called the state of his nerves. Here was evidence that he had good reason for anxiety.

Then, from somewhere within the house, came a shattering, ear-piercing scream, and then another, and another. It was impossible to tell whether the din came from near or far, still less whether it was female or male. Maybury had not known that the human organism could make so loud a noise, even in the bitterest distress. It was shattering to listen to, especially in the enclosed, hot, total darkness. And this was nothing momentary: the screaming went on and on, a paroxysm, until Maybury had to clutch at himself not to scream in response.

He fell off the bed and floundered about for the heavy curtains. Some light on the scene there must be, if possible, some new air in the room. He found the curtains within a moment and dragged back first one and then the other.

There was no more light than before.

Shutters, perhaps? Maybury's arm stretched out gingerly. He could feel neither wood or metal.

The light switch. It must be found.

While Maybury fell about in the darkness, the screaming stopped on a ghoulish gurgle, perhaps as if the

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sufferer had vomited immensely and then passed out, or perhaps as if the sufferer had in mercy passed away altogether. Maybury continued to search.

It was harder than ever to say how long it took, but in the end he found the switch, and the immediate mystery was explained. Behind the drawn-back curtains was, as the children say, just wall. The room apparently had no window, The curtains were mere decoration.

All was silent once more, once more extremely silent. Bannard's bed was turned back as neatly as if in the full light of day.

Maybury cast off Bannard's pajamas and, as quicklly as his state permitted, resumed his own clothes. Not that he had any very definite course of action. Simply it seemed better to be fully dressed. He looked vaguely inside his pocketbook to confirm that his money was still there.

He went to the door and made cautiously to open it and seek some hint into the best thing for him to do, the best way to make off.

The door was unopenable. There was no movement in it at all. It had been locked at the least, perhaps more. If Bannard had done it, he had been astonishingly quiet about it, conceivably experienced.

Maybury tried to apply himself to thinking calmly.

The upshot was that once more, and even more hurriedly, he removed his clothes, disposed of them suitably, and resumed Bannard's pajamas.

It would be sensible once more to turn out the light; to withdraw to bed, between the sheets, if possible; to stand by, as before. But Maybury found that turning out the light, the resultant total blackness, were more than he could face, however expedient.

Ineptly, he sat on the side of his bed, still trying to think things out, to plan sensibly. Would Bannard, after all this time, ever, in fact, return? At least during the course of that night?

He became aware that the electric light bulb had begun to crackle and fizzle. Then, with no further sound, it simply failed. It was not, Maybury thought, some final authoritative lights-out all over the house. It was merely that the single bulb had given out, however unfortunately from his own point of view, an isolated industrial incident.

He lay there, half in and half out, a long further period of time. He concentrated on the thought that nothing had actually happened that was dangerous. Ever since his schooldays (and, indeed, during them) he had become increasingly aware that there were many things

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strange to him, most of which had proved in the end to be apparently quite harmless.

Then Bannard was creeping back into the dark room. Maybury's ears had picked up no faint sound of a step in the passage, and, more remarkable, there had been no noise, either, of a turned key, let alone, perhaps, of a drawn bolt. Maybury's view of the bulb failure was confirmed by a repetition of the widening and narrowing column of light, dim, but probably no dimmer than before. Up to a point, lights were still on elsewhere. Bannard, considerate as before, did not try to turn on the light in the room. He shut the door with extraordinary skill, and Maybury could just, though only just, hear him slithering into his bed.

Still, there was one unmistakable development: at Bannard's return, the dark room had filled with perfume, the perfume favored, long ago, as it seemed, by the lady who had been so charming to Maybury in the lounge. Smell is, in any case, notoriously the most recollective of the senses.

Almost at once, this time, Bannard not merely fell obtrusively asleep, but was soon snoring quite loudly.

Maybury had every reason to be at least irritated by everything that was happening, but instead he soon fell asleep himself. So long as Bannard was asleep, he was at least in abeyance as an active factor in the situation; and many perfumes have their own drowsiness, as Iago remarked. Angela passed temporarily from the forefront of Maybury's mind.

Then he was awake again. The light was on once more, and Maybury supposed that he had been awakened deliberately, because Bannard was standing there by his bed. Where and how had he found a new light bulb? Perhaps he kept a supply in a drawer. This seemed so likely that Maybury thought no more of the matter.

It was very odd, however, in another way also.

When Maybury had been at school, he had sometimes found difficulty in distinguishing certain boys from certain other boys. It had been a very large school, and boys do often look alike. Nonetheless, it was a situation that Maybury thought best to keep to himself, at the time and since. He had occasionally made responses or approaches based upon misidentifications, but he had been fortunate in never being made to suffer for it bodily, even though he had suffered much in his self-regard.

And now it was the same. Was the man standing there really Bannard? One obvious thing was that Bannard had an aureole or fringe of red hair, whereas this

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man's fringe was quite grey. There was also a different expression and general look, but Maybury was more likely to have been mistaken about that. The pajamas seemed to be the same, but that meant little.

"I was just wondering if you'd care to talk for a bit," said Bannard. One had to assume that Bannard it was, at least to start off with. "I didn't mean to wake you up. I was just making sure."

"That's all right, I suppose," said Maybury.

"I'm over my first beauty sleep," said Bannard. "It can be lonely during the night." Under all the circumstances it was a distinctly absurd remark, but undoubtedly it was in Bannard's idiom.

"What was all that screaming?" enquired Maybury.

"I didn't hear anything," said Bannard. "I suppose I slept through it. But I can imagine. We soon learn to take no notice. There are sleepwalkers for that matter, from time to time."

"I suppose that's why the bedroom doors are so hard to open?"

"Not a bit," said Bannard, but he then added: "Well, partly, perhaps. Yes, partly. I think so. But it's just a knack really. We're not actually locked in, you know." He giggled. "But what makes you ask? You don't need to leave the room in order to go to the toilet. I showed you, old man."

So it really must be Bannard, even though his eyes seemed to be a different shape and even a different color, as the hard light caught them when he laughed.

"I expect I was sleepwalking myself," said Maybury warily.

"There's no need to get the wind up," said Bannard, "like a kid at a new school. All that goes on here is based on the simplest of natural principles: eating good food regularly, sleeping long hours, not taxing the overworked brain. The food is particularly important. You just wait for breadfast, old man, and see what you get. The most tremendous spread, I promise you."

"How do you manage to eat it all?" asked Maybury. "Dinner alone was too much for me."

"We simply let Nature have its way. Or rather, perhaps, *her* way. We give Nature her head."

"But it's not *natural* to eat so much."

"That's all you know," said Bannard. "What you are old man, is effete." He giggled as Bannard had giggled, but he looked somehow unlike Maybury's recollection of Bannard. Maybury was almost certain there was some decisive difference.

The room still smelt of the woman's perfume; or perhaps it was largely Bannard who smelt of

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it, Bannard who now stood so close to Maybury. It was embarrassing that Bannard, if he really had to rise from his bed and wake Maybury up, did not sit down, though preferably not on Maybury's blanket.

"I'm not saying there's no suffering here," continued Bannard. "But where in the world are you exempt from suffering? At least no one rots away in some attic — or wretched single room, more likely. Here there are no single rooms. We all help one another. What can you and I do for one another, old man?"

He took a step nearer and bent slightly over Maybury's face. His pajamas really reeked perfume.

It was essential to be rid of him, but essential to do it uncontentiously. The prospect should accept the representative's point of view as far as possible unawares.

"Perhaps we could talk for just five or ten minutes more," said Maybury, "and then I should like to go to sleep again, if you will excuse me. I ought to explain that I slept very little last night owing to my wife's illness."

"Is your wife pretty?" asked Bannard. "Really pretty? With this and that?" He made a couple of gestures, quite conventional though not formerly seen in drawing rooms.

"Of course she is," said Maybury. "What do you think?"

"Does she really turn you on? Make you lose control of yourself?"

"Naturally," said Maybury. He tried to smile, to show he had a sense of humor which could help him to cope with tasteless questions.

Bannard now not merely sat on Maybury's bed, but pushed his frame against Maybury's legs, which gave not much room to withdraw, owing to the tightness of the blanket, as Bannard sat on it.

"Tell us about it," said Bannard. "Tell us exactly what it's like to be a married man. Has it changed your whole life? Transformed everything?"

"Not exactly. In any case, I married years ago."

"So now there is someone else. *I* understand."

"No, actually there is not."

"Love's old sweet song still sings to you?"

"If you like to put it like that, yes. I love my wife. Besides she's ill. And we have a son. There's him to consider too."

"How old is your son?"

"Nearly sixteen."

"What color are his hair and eyes?"

"Really, I'm not sure. No particular color. He's not a baby, you know."

"Are his hands still soft?"

"I shouldn't think so."

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"Do you love your son, then?"

"In his own way, yes, of course."

"I should love him were he mine, and my wife too."

It seemed to Maybury that Bannard said it with real sentiment. What was more, he looked at least twice as sad as when Maybury had first seen him: twice as old, and twice as sad. It was all ludicrous, and Maybury at last felt really tired, despite the lump of Bannard looming over him and looking different.

"Time's up for me," said Maybury. "I'm sorry. Do you mind if we go to sleep again?"

Bannard rose at once to his feet, turned his back on Maybury's corner, and went to his bed without a word, thus causing further embarrassment.

It was again left to Maybury to turn out the light and to shove his way back to bed through the blackness.

Bannard had left more than a waft of perfume behind him, which perhaps helped Maybury to sleep once more almost immediately, despite all things.

Could the absurd conversation with Bannard have been a dream? Certainly what happened next was a dream, for there was Angela in her nightdress with her hands on her poor head, crying out "Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!" Maybury could not but comply, and in Angela's place, there was the boy Vincent with early morning tea for him. Perforce the light was on once more, but that was not a matter to be gone into.

"Good morning, Mr. Maybury."

"Good morning, Vincent."

Bannard already had his tea.

Each of them had a pot, a cup, jugs of milk and hot water, and a plate of bread and butter, all set on a tray. There were eight large triangular slices each.

"No sugar," cried out Bannard genially. "Sugar kills appetite."

Perfect rubbish, Maybury reflected and squinted across at Bannard, recollecting his last rubbishy conversation. By the light of morning, even if it were but the same electric light, Bannard looked much more himself, fluffy red aureole and all. He looked quite rested. He munched away at his bread and butter. Maybury thought it best to go through the motions of following suit. From over there Bannard could hardly see the details.

"Race you to the bathroom, old man," Bannard cried out.

"Please go first," responded Maybury soberly. As he had no means of conveying the bread and butter off the premises, he hoped with the air of the towel, to conceal it in his skimpy pajamas jacket and

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push it down the toilet. Even Bannard would probably not attempt to throw his arms round him and so uncover the offense.

Down in the lounge, there they all were, with Falkner presiding indefinably but genially. Wan though authentic sunlight trickled in from the outer world, but Maybury observed that the front door was still bolted and chained. It was the first thing he looked for. Universal expectation was detectable, of breakfast, Maybury assumed. Bannard, at all times shrimpish, was simply lost in the throng. Cecile he could not see, but he made a point of not looking very hard. In any case, several of the people looked new, or at least different. Possibly it was a further example of the phenomenon Maybury had encountered with Bannard.

Falkner crossed to him at once, the recalcitrant but still privileged outsider. "I can promise you a good breakfast, Mr. Maybury," he said confidentially. "Lentils. Fresh fish. Rump steak. Apple pie made by ourselves, with lots and lots of cream."

"I mustn't stay for it," said Maybury. "I simply mustn't. I have my living to earn. I must go at once."

He was quite prepared to walk a couple of miles, indeed, all set for it. The automobile organization, which had given him the route from which he should never have diverged, could recover his car. They had done it for him before, several times.

A faint shadow passed over Falkner's face, but he merely said in a low voice, "If you really insist, Mr. Maybury —"

"I'm afraid I have to," said Maybury.

"Then I'll have a word with you in a moment."

None of the others seemed to concern themselves. Soon they all filed off, talking quietly among themselves or, in many cases, saying nothing.

"Mr. Maybury," said Falkner, "you can respect a confidence?"

"Yes," said Maybury steadily.

"There was an incident here last night. A death. We do not talk about such things. Our guests do not expect it."

"I am sorry," said Maybury.

"Such things still upset me," said Falkner. "Nonetheless I must not think about that. My immediate task is to dispose of the body. While the guests are preoccupied. To spare them all knowledge, all pain."

"How is that to be done?" enquired Maybury.

"In the usual manner, Mr. Maybury. The hearse is drawing up outside the door even as we speak. Where you are concerned, the point

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is this. If you wish for what in other circumstances I could call a lift, I could arrange for you to join the vehicle. It is traveling quite a distance. We find that best." Falkner was progressively unfastening the front door. "It seems the best solution, don't you think, Mr. Maybury? At least it is the best I can offer. Though you will not be able to thank Mr. Bannard, of course."

A coffin was already coming down the stairs, borne on the shoulders of four men in black, with Vincent, in his white jacket, coming first, in order to leave no doubt of the way and to prevent any loss of time.

"I agree," said Maybury. "I accept. Perhaps you would let me know my bill for dinner?"

"I shall waive that too, Mr. Maybury," replied Falkner, "in the present circumstances. We have a duty to hasten. We have others to think of. I shall simply say how glad we have all been to have you with us." He held out his hand. "Good-by, Mr. Maybury."

Maybury was compelled to travel with the coffin itself because there simply was not room for him on the front seat, where a director of the firm, a corpulent man, had to be accommodated with the driver. The nearness of death compelled a respectful silence among the company in the rear compartment, especially when a living stranger was in the midst; and Maybury alighted unobtrusively when a bus stop was reached. One of the undertaker's men said that he should not have to wait long.

UPCOMING INSTITUTE FOR SCIENCE FICTION TEACHERS

The second Institute for Science Fiction Teachers will be held at the University of Kansas, June 6 to 26, 1976. The institute was organized by James Gunn, KU professor of English and former president of the Science Fiction Writers of America, and is designed to prepare teachers who are being called upon to teach new sf courses at academic levels from junior high to college.

Guest lecturers for the coming program will include Gordon Dickson, Frederik Pohl and Theodore Sturgeon.

Applications will be accepted until April 15, 1976. Address all inquiries to James Gunn, Department of English, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kan. 66045.

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In response to a letter from Cy Chauvin published in *F&SF* for January 1976.

Dear Mr. Chauvin:

I wish I had been provided the opportunity to reply to your letter (*F&SF*, January) in the same issue it appeared, as was the situation between Dr. Asimov and Rev. Petras. Now I must bite back many months after the initial poke of the stick through the bars of my cage and, as usual, for those who did not read your letter, or who have forgotten what it was about, it will seem that we have here the cranky growling of a rabid beast. Well, the Universe type-casts us all, and so I'll play my role to the hilt.

At core, Mr. Chauvin, my response to your opinions about why I don't care to be called a "science fiction" writer, but merely a *writer who writes some sf*, is that you think, write and lay value-judgements on Silverberg, Malzberg and myself that are simply uninformed, adolescent and infinitely fannish. For a fan magazine's natterings, that would be fine. But on display in a professional magazine of considerable literary merit they demand *some* response lest silence indicate agreement or disinterest.

For openers, how I choose to run my life and my career is none of your business. I don't insist that you call yourself a "letterhack" and you have no right to tell me what I should call *my*self. The unarguable fact that I don't write sf in the generally, widely accepted meaning of that time-weathered marketing tag, need not be restated. Poor Ed Ferman has many cancellations of F&SF subscriptions to attest to the truth of the statement. Unlike you, I'm not in love with a phony categorization that lumps Thomas Disch in with Perry Rhodan, that puts Ballard beside Edgar Rice Burroughs and thereby devalues both, that insists Vonnegut and Mack Reynolds write the same kind of material.

The words you jam into the mouths of Bob, Barry and myself would make a mastodon choke. I've heard and read what Bob and Barry have to say about their disenchantments with writing in and for the sf field. Nowhere has one of us said that sf readers "prefer bad sf to good." We have merely pointed out that the gawdawful Perry Rhodan potboilers are up to #83 as this is written, apparently selling in the millions of copies, while Pangborn's *Mirror For Observers*, Silverberg's *Son of Man*, Dick's *Man in the High Castle* and Bester's *The Demolished Man*, to name just a few, have been until *very* recently far out of print. You can wriggle any way you choose, Mr. Chauvin, but unless you believe that Perry Rhodan novels, written strictly for a Deutsche mark ... or Star Trek books recycling the same tv stock players story after story ... or mindless sword'n'sorcery novels endlessly spading-over the dirt of Robert E. Howard's literary grave ... or retrogressive "series" novels like Hook, Rack, the Expendables, Balzan of the Cat People and Atar the Merman are better than the works of Philip Jose Farmer, Theodore Sturgeon, John Brunner and Kate Wilhelm (all of whose books combined don't sell one-thousandth as

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well as the fan-gossipy *Star Trek Lives!*, then I don't see how you can deny that sf readers *seem* to prefer bad rather than good. But *we* didn't say it. Facts speak for themselves; and in that nasty world of reality where publishers and wholesalers and retail outlets live — rather than the Never-Never land wherein you clearly reside — its *sales* that decide whether books get published and displayed or get rejected. And if accepted, pulped.

Your immature foot-stamping that if a reader can't see beyond a label he isn't worth having, is terrific for you, honey. You aren't making a living writing. It's easy for fans who picture themselves as latter-day Walter Lippmanns or Eliot Fremont-Smiths to render such sophmoric pronunciamientos; they fill the pages of fanzines with half-baked and wholly tunnel-visioned opinions of the state of the literary world; and as long as they keep these gossipy bits of babble confined to fanzines, like the "manimals" on Dr. Moreau's island, no one is really bothered. But when the gargoyles try to take over the Cathedral, setting out such silly nonsense in, for instance, the pages of *F&SF*, someone has to point out how ridiculous they are. And since I've already won the title of Universal Mean Bastard, I'm more than happy to do it.

Of *course* you feel a reader who can't get beyond a label isn't worth having, Mr. Chauvin. You aren't engaged in a lifetime career of communicating through your writing. You would have all writers of surrealism, magic realism, fantasy, science fiction and a million other etcetera designations lumped together under that sf umbrella. That way all you'd have to do is go to the indicated racks in your newsstand and pick what you want. And that's fine for you. But what about those of us who want to go our own way, who want to write whatever we choose without having to be pigeonholed? Is that some terrible sin against the wonderfulness of sf? In my case, I have a body of writing behind me that is as much non-sf as it is fantasy. Two books of televison essays, four books of mainstream stories, a collection of suspense fiction, a mainstream rock nostalgia novel, an autobiography about juvenile delinquency and jails, a collection of film and television screenplays. Why should potential readers who might enjoy these books never get the chance to read them because *Web of the City*, a street gang novel, is dumped in with all the "we-have-been-visited-by-aliens-who-built-the-pyramids" books?

Why *don't* I have the right to reject a label?

Do *you* like being labeled an uninformed fan?

Why should a book like *Deathbird Stories*, clearly *not* sf, be reviewed with pure sf books in the *New York Times*, and be found wanting on the basis of its having contained precious little sf material? And what the hell is so bloody holy about those two letters s and f? John Collier, H. G. Wells, Donald Barthelme, John Hersey, E. L. Doctorow, Vladimir Nabokov, Roald Dahl, David Lindsay and Anna Kavan managed to write sensational, immortal fiction without being bothered that what they were setting down might possibly be called sf by some, and might be called other things by other people. They were *writers*, not *sf* writers, and they received universal attention because they weren't shunted off into the giant ant and space opera ghetto.

Who's to blame, you ask? Well,

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publishers and distributors and readers and writers and fans like you who insist on the baby blue blanket security of your little labels. The blame is unequally shared by all those who wish to constrain writers in any way. I became a writer for many reasons, but one of the most important was because I treasure personal freedom. Not equality, or camaraderie, or the approbation of a tiny coterie of people who seem to have some nebulous vested interest in keeping mavericks from bolting the pack ... freedom. Total personal freedom that permits me to go as far and as fast as my talent and wind will take me. As long as I don't fall in the traces, as long as I keep working with Flaubert's "clean hands and composure," I'm entitled to call myself what I damned please. And not all the fan bleatings of all the wounded, rejected Chauvins in the world will convince me that I should continue trying to write for an audience one human being less than the entire population of the known universe.

Mr. Chauvin, Bob and Barry and I are not the only dissatisfied ones. There are dozens of others. Ask around. There are also those who have publicly and vociferously announced they *enjoy* being called sf writers, that it is a noble title. Dynamite. If they wish to call themselves that, or permit themselves to be called that, they are entitled ... and I'd take up the bludgeon to back them in their position. But get hip to the facts that there are others of us who don't *choose* to be servants of that coterie of categorizers. Call it insufferable ego, or delusions of grandeur, or venality, or anything you please ....

But for God's sake divest yourself of these ridiculous fan attitudes that if readers or critics or reviewers can't join with you in believing in the holiness of the merchandising label "science fiction" they aren't worth bothering about. Because the reality, Mr. Chauvin, is that there are a hundred thousand non-sf readers to every hundred readers who drool and roll their eyes in joy at the "sci-fi" label.

And though you apparently feel sf readers are "the chosen people," the simple truth is that a great many non-sf readers are intelligent, too. And wanting to write in the "mainstream" of world literature doesn't mean Robert Silverberg will write *Valley of the Dolls* or that Barry Malzberg will become head writer for *Gilligan's Island*. It doesn't even mean nasty old Harlan will write any worse than he does right now.

And if you think there's an inherent nobility attached to writing sf, then explain to me why so many of our finest talents have to scrape and scuffle to make a decent living at it. If we're so goddamned important and what we're writing is so obviously uplifting and invigorating, why do we still get paid a top fee of 5¢ a word in magazines and anthologies, why is an average advance payment for a hardcover novel only $3000, and why does Bob Silverberg — maybe the best of all of us — have to write a *Star Trek* movie in hopes that the credit will convince half a dozen publishers who've let his books go out-of-print that perhaps they should reissue Silverberg for the clamoring masses?

When you have answers to questions like those, instead of slipping into a snit about our ignoring the dummies who can't get past the dumb covers on our books, the ones with the neologism "sci-fi" on them ... *then* you can start opening up your yap in public forums.

Because then you'll have maybe a solution to the problem, instead of

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sounding like part of the problem.

— Harlan Ellison

BUDRYS: INTELLIGENT AND THOUGHTFUL

I am pleased and challenged to see Algis Budrys contributing "book reviews" or "criticism" or whatever to *F&SF*. He is one of the very few intelligent *and* thoughtful persons to dwell in sf; perhaps his quiet but audacious voice will allow readers (and writers and editors) the leisure to consider his words before reacting. At least one hopes for this — Budrys puts more care and effort into his "whatever" than most readers are willing to deal with.

His thoughts on *Dhalgren* beg for a longer attempt to probe Delany, especially in the light of the maybe-never shotgun wedding of sf and "the main body of literature." Is he, or someone, willing to go further with this?

One also hopes Pamela Sargent will take his words with equal careful thought.

— Mark Mumner

BUT MALE

Many of Algis Budrys's remarks on Pamela Sargent's book, *Women of Wonder*, inspire comment. He feels that "the stories here are used only incidentally to divert, empathize with, or parade before the reader." This, it seems to me, is an inaccuracy, since none of these stories could be "blows against the male SF establishment," unless they were *first* stories which women could empathize with. If "Sargent's grasp of the history of her chosen genre is not quite good enough," then I would likewise propose that Budrys's grasp of Sargent's reasons for publishing this book is also not good enough. I would suggest that she is trying to broaden the scope of current science fiction.

Like Sargent, I feel that science fiction needs to be written from female as well as male points of view. (And, yes, there *is* such a thing as a female point of view.) Budrys seems to feel that feminists should not recognize any differences between the sexes ... Any anthropologist can tell you of culturally engrained differences which can and do influence behavior on a male/female basis. Sargent's book offers a woman's way of looking at the subject, which has special meaning for many women who feel the same way.

I agree that science fiction has probably never been an all-male field. However, I doubt that anyone could say that it has ever been a balanced field. Perhaps some magazines show "a steady appearance of female bylines," but *none* show 50% (or any sizeable percentage) of female writers, editors, staff and publishers. This field has always been overwhelmingly male.

This is a situation which is only now being slowly changed. Feminist science fiction readers can now look forward to a different genre of fiction produced by writers with different attitudes. In this sense, Pamela Sargent's book has something important to offer the SF establishment.

— Ms. Paula Emmons

SLEEPYHEAD

The Lumley story in the Dec. issue deserved a more thorough warning in its intro. I realize that Lovecraftian stories are a fine old tradition among fantasy magazines; I am mainly sorry that this one was not better. In Mr.

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Lumley's favor, he only used "elder" once — and at such a point in the story that it did dispell any lingering doubts as to his honorable intentions. The word "eldritch" was I believe left out altogether!

While the requisite original-source materials were properly cited, and numerous direct references were made at appropriate times it was all done too crudely. The afficianado was insulted; the novice was made little wiser. Wit spurned for expedient deadline? —

As a story, plotwise it was quite good. The obligatory bit of modernizing sex was handled reasonably well, but with so many good plot elements, and a strong flavorful beginning (the small-town-in-north-woods reminded me of several such I have seen), the repititions of narrator's disbelief in the myth palled quickly. And padded the story out unreasonably. Too many logical bolsterings of the supernatural "facts" had been introduced too early, and a meteorologist should have had better acceptance of factual data than Mr. Lumley's did. If he did not accept any of it as true early on, why then was the physical description of the monster capable of making him so horrified, etc. And so forth.

I have more complaints — perhaps because it seemed so promising I was disappointed at its failure. Ah, but this is *not* the Master! I remember one winter after reading a spat of H.P.L. being conciously afraid to sit near a window ... Mr. Lumley's narrator died most dreadfully and I fell right to sleep!

— *Melanie B. Johnston*

THE JOY OF SF

Recently, my husband has begun to share my interest in science fiction. Last weekend he was reading *Fantasy and Science Fiction* while I was typing his notes for school. Suddenly, he arose and began to make sexual advances to me as I sat at the typewriter.

It turned out that he had been reading "In Case of Danger, Prsp the Ntxivbw" by Charles W. Runyon. Reading the story had turned *his* virility dial way up.

I hereby thank Charles Runyon for making SF even more of a family affair for us.

— *Patricia Crapanzano*

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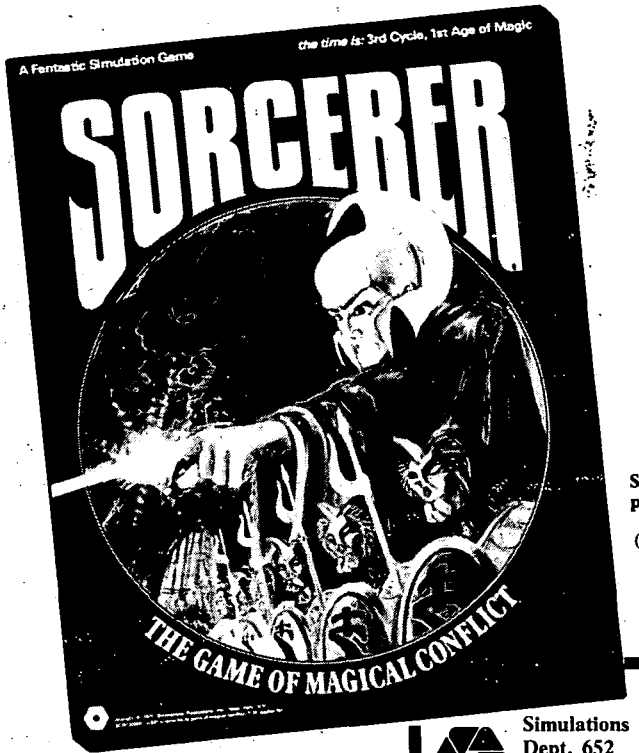

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